Organic Training Needs Assessment
Saskatchewan Organic Sector

June 30, 2006

Conducted by:
Sage Management Services
Lorraine Beaudette, President
RR 3, GS 303, Box 9
Saskatoon SK S7K 3J6
Phone 306-956-3136
sage@yourlink.ca

Saskatchewan Organic Directorate
Box 3
Elrose, SK S0L 2Z0
Phone: 306-574-4323
Fax: 306-574-2025
Email: faye.doug@sasktel.net
Website: www.saskorganic.com

Dear Saskatchewan Organic Industry Stakeholder:

While both the project steering committee and SOD Board of Directors have accepted Sage Management Service's report, and are in general agreement with much of the report, we wish to point out to the readers of the report that the content and language, including the recommendations, are that of Sage Management Services.

We look forward to the discussions that this study will generate in the Organic Community.

Yours truly,
ARNOLD TAYLOR ON BEHALF OF

Doug Bone, President
The Project Steering Committee and
The Saskatchewan Organic Directorate - Board of Directors

Table of Contents

Forward 5

Acknowledgments 6

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 7

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN & RESEARCH FINDINGS 8

I. Organic Food Production 8

Australia 9

Latin America 9

Europe 9

Asia 10

Africa 11

North America 11

II. Consumers 12

Global Consumers 12

Canadian Consumers 14

Saskatchewan Consumer Opportunities 16

III. Marketing 17

Alternative or Direct Marketing 18

Marketing Cooperatives 19

Standards & Regulations 21

IV. Organic Education and Training 21

Existing Support Systems 23

V. Fractionation 24

VI. Commission 25

VII. Other 25

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT 26

I. Producer Needs as Identified by Producer Survey, Focus Groups and Consultations with Producers 26

Survey Background 26

Farm Information 27

Producer Skill Level 29
Communication and Technology 30
Level of Education 31
Current Methods of Gathering Knowledge 32
Areas of Training Needed 34
Education Costs 41
Customers and Sales 50
Prairie Ursuline Centre 55
Focus Groups and Other Producer Consultations 56

II. Additional Consultations 58
Certification Requirements 58
First Nations Needs 58
Wild Rice Producers 59
Assessment by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Staff 59
Producer Needs as Assessed by Certifiers 60

III. Literature Review 61

IV. Educational Models & Opportunities 63
Credit Studies 63
Certificate Programs 65
Non-credit Studies 67
Dedicated Organic Learning Centres 69
Apprenticeships and Mentoring Programs 72
Other Educational Venues 74

VI. Program & Curriculum Development 75
University Certificate and Degree Programs 75
Mentorship Programs and Field Studies 77
Conferences and Workshops 77

FEASIBILITY STUDY 77
Prairie Ursuline Centre 77
Prairie Ursuline Centre as a Dedicated Organic Learning Centre 77

Renovations to the Facility 80
Purchase of Equipment 80
Start-up Costs 80
Estimated Costs of Operation 81
PUC Suitability 82
PUC Risks of Ownership 83
PUC as a Host for Organic Events 83
The Craik Alternative 84
IN SUMMARY 88

APPENDICES 89
Appendix A: Recommendations 89
Appendix B: References 92
Appendix C: Letter to Stakeholders (SAF Committee Chair) 95
Appendix D: Letter to Stakeholders (Sage Management Services) 96
Appendix E: Invitation to Stakeholders (Sage Management Services) 97
Appendix F: The Producer Survey 98
Appendix G: Press Release (April 3, 2006) 103

Forward

This study primarily takes a look at training needs of the Saskatchewan Organic Sector and how those needs may be met. The study focuses on the current climate of the sector and identifies appropriate methods of delivery for its stakeholders. It includes an assessment of the Prairie Ursuline Centre in Bruno Saskatchewan, as well as a review of other opportunities for the development of an Organic Learning Centre in the province.

A number of methodologies were employed to capture the required information for the project. These included, but were not limited to:

- Attendance at Organic Update in Bruno, Saskatchewan, on February 15 and 16, 2006.
- Focus group sessions held at four locations with a total of 30 people participating.
- Surveys completed by organic producers in a number of ways, but mainly via telephone with a total of 162 surveys completed. The surveys consisted of a Tier 1 Survey, which developed a baseline of information, and a Tier 2 Survey, which went into greater detail on educational needs and requirements.
- Extensive internet and web-based research, review of other relevant studies and reports.

Meetings, discussions and additional surveys were also conducted with numerous stakeholders, including:

- Certifiers
- Saskatchewan Organic Directorate Board of Directors
- Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada
- Canadian International Grains Institute
- First Nations Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan
- University of Saskatchewan
- Gabriel Dumont Institute
- Northern Lights Foods and Wild Rice growers
- Processors
- Retailers
- Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Staff
- Tribal Councils Agriculture Staff
- Canadian Wheat Board Organic Marketing Staff
- Prairie Ursuline Centre
- Back to the Farm Foundation
- Craik Eco-Centre
- Organic Connections

Acknowledgments

Sage Management Services would sincerely like to thank the Steering Committee for their commitment to the project. Committee members include:

Brenda Frick (Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada)
Arnold Taylor (Saskatchewan Organic Directorate)
Diane Olchowski and Brad McKenzie (Sagehill Business Development Corporation)
Pat Flaten (Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology)
Marlene Luneng (Carlton Trail Regional College)
Randy Kehrig (Prairie Ursuline Centre)
Ron Monette, Don Perrault, Sandy Lowndes and Sherrilyn Phelps
(Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food)
Ray Bauml and Marc Loiselle (Organic Producers)

Thank you to the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate and to Lester Wyatt, for managing administrative matters of the study. Without funding, this project would never have occurred. Special thanks go to Saskatchewan Learning for their financial support through the Sector Partnership Component of Job Start Future Skills.

Sage would also like to recognize contributors to this project, including Kim Lonsdale of Interactive Management, for his work on the Feasibility study of PUC, and Susan Bond of Fulcrum Editorial for expertise on various editorial aspects of this project.

Last, and most important, this report would not be possible without the assistance and co-operation of Saskatchewan organic producers and stakeholders, who gave freely of their time by participating in surveys, focus groups and discussions. Your patience and assistance is appreciated, and the information contributed will be used to further support the growth of this important sector in Saskatchewan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The organic sector is poised for great growth at a time when conventional farmers are struggling for survival. Demand for organic products is growing at a rate of 20% per year. Organic consumers are health conscious and affluent, and price is often fourth or fifth on their minds when making a purchase. In order to ensure that producers reap the rewards of this opportunity, it is imperative that they be provided with the tools and resources they need to be successful.

This study found that there is a lack of institutional and industry support in terms of learning and skill development. However, these needs can be met by bringing educational institutions together to work cooperatively on programs that can be offered in Saskatchewan and across Canada. There is a need to ensure that any resources incorporate the new Canadian Standards and Regulations.

Organic producers are concerned with supporting their rural communities and more likely to access goods and services locally. This carries through in their preference to access training as close to home as possible. Educational opportunities should be delivered in a rural setting whenever possible. Further to this, there is a definite need to develop a comprehensive mentorship program that provides mentors with the tools and resources needed to carry out their work, and producers with hands-on learning. An integrated approach to training that encompasses research is also crucial. Since Saskatchewan possesses ample research staff and facilities, strong consideration should be given to directing these resources towards organic studies.

Existing programs and organizations such as Organic Connections, Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (OACC) and Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (SOD) should be exploited to their full potential by recognizing and expanding the educational role they perform for organic producers.

The public policy objective of expanding the organic sector may be at odds with the interests of some producers who see new entrants as competitors. They feel their knowledge is a source of competitive advantage and new entrants will erode premiums. Members of the organic sector must come together to create a shared vision and strategy for the growth of their sector and must overcome the fractionation that currently exists. There is great opportunity to fully develop markets and ensure economic success for all through value chains and co-operation.

Despite differences in some areas, all study participants strongly supported the need to engage the consumer in a more meaningful way. A consumer education and awareness campaign would benefit the sector and add to its growth.

This study was very broad in nature and covered a great deal of ground. In some cases, additional study and review may be required, prior to taking further action. The list of recommendations is indicative of the current needs of the Saskatchewan organic sector as it moves towards achieving its true growth potential.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN & RESEARCH FINDINGS

I. Organic Food Production

Organic farming has grown dramatically in the last few years with the most recent information[1] indicating that there are now more than 31 million hectares (see Figure 1) in approximately 110 countries throughout the world. The recent certification of almost 3 million hectares of pastoral land in China contributes to the nearly 5-million-hectare increase since 2004, when organic land base was placed at 26 million hectares.

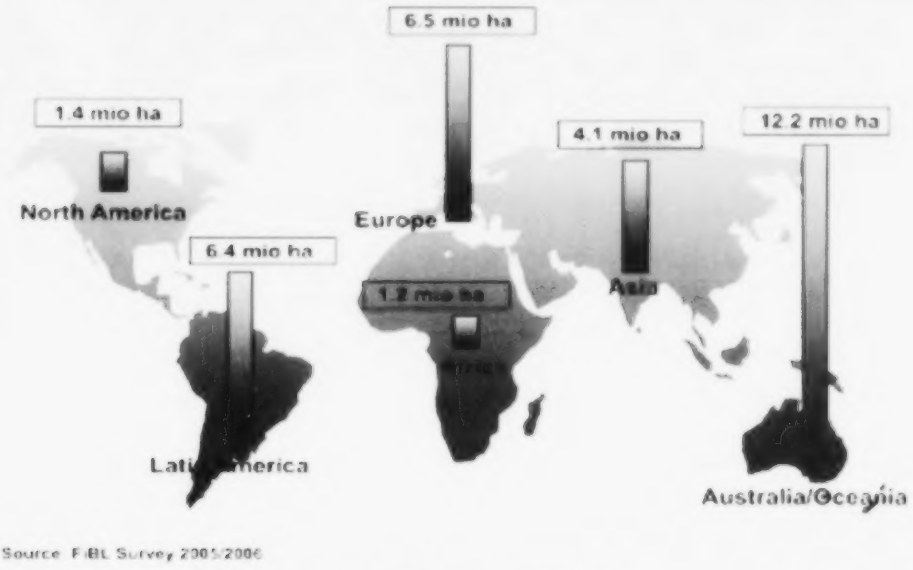


Figure 1 – FiBL Survey 2005/2006

The Australia/Oceania area boasts most of the world's organic land, with the country of Australia leading the way with 12.2 million hectares alone. This is followed by China with 3.5 million hectares and then Argentina with 2.8 million hectares. All three countries are characterized by extensive grazing holdings in their certified land base.

When comparing organic farmland use to total agricultural area, however, European countries such as Austria, Switzerland and other Scandinavian countries set an example with more than ten percent of the land being managed organically.

Projections are for a worldwide increase in organic lands, as markets for organic products continue to develop throughout the world.

---

[1] See Helga Willer and Minou Yussefi (Eds.)The World of Organic Agriculture 2006,Statistics and Emerging Trends, IFOAM Publication, 8th, revised edition, February 2006, 196 pages.

Australia

The Australian organic industry is experiencing growth rates of around 25% per annum. Key production areas for Australia include beef, fruit and vegetables, rice, wool, herbs, and wine; dairy products are also rapidly growing. The production is driven by overseas demand, with over 70% being shipped to Germany, the Netherlands and United Kingdom.

The majority of Australia's land is dedicated to low-intensity grazing; "one organic hectare" there is not directly equivalent to "one organic hectare" in Switzerland, due to its low productivity. Government support for the organic sector has been good, in recognition of export potential, but no subsidies are in place for organic production. National standards are in place but apply only to export product and as an informal standard domestically. Sector growth in Australia may be stemmed by the limited government support in research and outreach programs, as well as by long and complex marketing chains.

Latin America

The total certified organic area is now at 6.4 million hectares, with an additional 10.6 million hectares listed as "Wild Harvested" areas. The Latin American sector, for the most part, has developed mainly under its own steam with little or no support from government bodies. Organic coffees, grains and bananas from Central America, sugar from Paraguay, and cereals and meats from Argentina comprise the main organic exporting activities out of Latin America.

Cuba presents a very interesting model in terms of how they have utilized their scientific resources to support organic production. They have collected locally occurring strains of microorganisms that perform useful functions in natural ecosystems. These range from disease microbes that are specific to certain crop pests — and thus are non-toxic to other forms of life — to other microorganisms that fix atmospheric nitrogen and make it available to crop plants or that aid in normal processes of nutrient cycling. These are then massively reproduced to be used as bio-pesticides and bio-fertilizers in agro-ecosystems. Through this process, the Cubans have seen the reincorporation of rural populations into agriculture through their labor, as well as through their knowledge of traditional farming techniques. This model is designed to stem the rural-urban flood of migrants, and to provide food security for the nation's population. A closer look at the developments in Cuba may benefit Saskatchewan as it moves forward with an organic research program.

Europe

Since the early 1990's European countries have rapidly pursued organic farming. Many countries have targets for at least 10% of agriculture to be dedicated to organics by 2010. Countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Germany have stated goals and generous conversion assistance packages for farmers. In some cases, these conversion subsidies are replacing the "set aside" and other financial support programs. Although growth has more recently slowed, Europe still boasts almost 6.5 million hectares of organically managed land on 170,000 farms. Italy has more than one fifth

of the organic land, and more than 25% of the total organic farms are located there. There are significant differences from one European country to another, in terms of total organic land farmed as a percentage of agricultural land. Where Austria, for example, has more than 12 % of the land farmed organically, other countries are at less than 1 %.

Overall, however, the organic sector is very well developed in Europe, with government, industry and institutional support throughout. The European Union (EU) Action Plan recognizes a dual societal role for organic farming. The EU Action Plan meets market demand for specific food products that are financed by consumers through price premiums, as well as delivering public goods such as environmental benefits, public health, social welfare, etc., and that are also financed by public means through government supports. Individual European countries have adopted a variety of incentives under this plan,[2] including conversion and support payments for organic lands; targets for land under organic management, marketing programs and support for organic research and education estimated at 70 to 80 million Euros annually. As a result of this research and learning, institutions are well-developed and funded, continue to be world leaders, and are excellent models to look too when developing these resources for the Saskatchewan sector.

Asia

Although the area under organic management in Asia is comparatively small, it is increasing rapidly. The total organic area in Asia is now about 4.1 million hectares, due to the increase in certified land in China. There is a lack of organic regulation as it applies to certification, and this is creating consumer confusion. Israel is the only country to have met EU regulation standards. The tendency is for most countries to have organic rules on imports — more so than on exports. The domestic markets play a significant role in Asia, with the Japanese organic food and drink market being the most substantial. Marketing within these countries varies significantly and includes ad-hoc organic bazaars, small retail shops, supermarket shelves, multi-level direct marketing schemes and internet selling. Exports consist mainly of low value commodity crops and fresh produce but, more recently, Organic Aquaculture has begun to emerge as a potential export product base. In Indonesia the government is supporting development of organic farming by providing cattle and poultry to farmers whose manure can be used as an organic fertilizer. In the Punjab of Northern India, a new training institute and research centre for organic farming for small and marginal farmers is being set up by HRH Prince Charles. The project, which is also supported by a foundation for sustainable development, will focus on exporting fresh and semi-processed vegetables and fruits to the United Kingdom, Middle East, South Asia and Europe.

---

[2] Dimitri, C. and L. Oberholtzer.2005. Market led versus government facilitated growth: Development of the U.S and EU organic Agriculture sectors. WRS-05-05. USDA Economic Research Service.26p available at http:www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/wrs0505/

Africa

Africa is motivated to pursue organic production for a number of reasons; increased demand in industrialized countries and soil development are two of them. The domestic market for organic products is relatively low in Africa, due to the low-income levels and lack of certification and inspection services. The majority of production is geared for export to the EU, which is where the bulk of African agricultural products end up. The land conditions in Africa are such that organic farming practices may aid in preventing further degradation and erosion. Only one African country currently meets EU standards, but significant progress is being made in Egypt and South Africa with two certifying organizations and a move towards developing standards.

North America

In North America, 3 % of the total agricultural lands are managed organically — this is almost 1.5 million hectares, with the number of farms totaling more than 15,000.

The organic sector in the United States (US) is continuing to grow, generating interest not only from producers but also consumers, policymakers and those interested in farm, environmental and nutritional issues. There has been an increase in the number of certification agencies accredited by United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). More diverse products are being introduced to meet demand, such as organic snack foods and beverages. Large food manufactures and multi-national companies are buying into the organic sector in a decisive manner. Government and industry support for organic production is very strong in the US. The formal adoption of the USDA's revised and strengthened National Organic Program (NOP) in 2000 has led to a dramatic increase in USDA activity in organic agriculture, with no less than eight of their agencies having started or expanding programs on organic agriculture in recent years. Even with these supports, however, there is still a recognized need for further research education and extension work in the organic sector. A Colorado State University Cooperative Extension paper[3] outlines numerous recommendations under Future Research Needs, Future Extension Needs and Education Action Items, which appear to correspond closely with the needs of Saskatchewan producers, and follows with a number of recommendations contained in this study.

In Canada, organic farming is on the rise, with 3,670 producers certified in 2004, an increase of just over 10% from 2003, and another 258 producers in transition for 2004.[4] This comprised 1.5% of total farmers and accounts for a production value in the $250 – $350 million range estimated for 2005. Domestic consumption is estimated to grow by about 20.6% per year from 2006 to 2015.

The organic sector in Saskatchewan is a growing and contributing member of the agriculture industry in the province. There are about 1,245 certified organic producers[5]

---

[3] Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, Fort Collins CO 80523-1172, Colorado State UCE available at http://dare.agsci.colostate.edu/extension/pubs.html - Aril 2006 - ABMR 06-01

[4] See Macey, Ann. (March 2004). Certified Organic Production in Canada 2004. Prepared for Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. Revised May 2004 & July 2004.

[5] See Macey, Ann. (Nov. 2005, Canadian Organic Growers). Certified Organic Production in Canada

in Saskatchewan, with a potential organic prairie grain value of $98 million. Saskatchewan is Canada's leading exporter of organic products and is home to over 35 small, medium and large scale organic marketers and processors. The majority of those exports are destined for the EU, the US and Japan.[6]

There has been moderate to good growth in processing particularly those products derived from grains and oilseeds. Some of the products available from Saskatchewan's organic processors include roasted flaxseed, flour, breakfast cereals, pulses, fruits and nuts, pancake mix, herbs, spices, soup mixes, hemp products, wild rice, wild mushrooms and processed oil products. It is felt that the organic vegetable market could be increased simply by establishing proper storage for fresh produce in close proximity to Saskatchewan's two major centers.

Organically certified and federally inspected slaughtering and processing facilities are not readily available to organic livestock producers in Saskatchewan, and this is seen as an impediment to further growth in organically raised livestock. That said, Saskatchewan is the headquarters for the Canadian Organic Livestock Association and, recently, Saskatchewan Organic Livestock was formed.

Organic livestock, poultry, horticulture and dairy are all areas of potential growth. If these sectors were to emerge in a more rapid manner this would impel the development of the organic feed market, which in turn would help sustain dedicated organic grain and forage producers. Improvements in organic practices, such as green manuring and intercropping, have increased yields and profitability for producers. Increased research and development into microbiology and soil ecology on the Prairies would be of benefit to producers and would increase marketing and transitional support.

II. Consumers

Global Consumers

There is growing support for organic and naturally produced foods worldwide. The Global Organic food and drink market was valued, by the Organic Monitor, at US $23 billion in 2002[7] with sales concentrated in the industrialized parts of the world. The distribution of Global food and drink revenues breaks out to 51% in North America, 46% in Western Europe and 3 % in other areas. Consumer interest is growing in other areas as well but is confined, due to the price premiums that are associated with organic products.

Upon analyzing consumer behavior in international countries, a picture of a global organic consumer is emerging. A typical consumer of organic products has the following attributes:

2004.

[6] See Saskatchewan Organic Marketing and Processing Directory. Reaching the World. Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization. (February 2005).

[7] The Global Market for Organic Food and Drink (Organic Monitor 2003) see www.organicmonitor.com

- Location – Lives in urban area, usually in a big city.
- Buyer Behavior – Discerning towards food and drink purchases, considering factors such as quality, provenance and production methods.
- Demographics – Typically well-educated and belonging to a middle to high social class.
- Purchasing Power – In a medium- to high-income household with relatively high purchasing power.

Industrialized nations have a sizable, well-educated middle class, which is why the organic food and drink sales are concentrated in these countries. As more countries develop economically and their populations become more affluent, demand for organic products is sure to increase. Rapid economic growth in countries like China, Brazil and South Africa is causing the upper social classes to expand, which in turn will push demand for organic products.

The Western European market was the largest in the world but has now been overtaken by the North American market. European sales of organic products were estimated to have hit US 10.5 billion in 2002. Following a rapid expansion period in the mid 90's, this market is now reported to be slowing down.

The North American market for organic products is reporting the highest growth rate worldwide, with the market value at nearly 12 billion US in 2002. Demand continues to remain strong and enjoy growth rates of 16 – 20% annually. The industry in the US was given a boost in 2002 when the National Organic Program (NOP) was adopted by the United Stated Department of Agriculture (USDA). The implementation of the standards and enforced regulations of the sector heightened consumer awareness and confidence in organic products and boosted sales. It is reasonable to expect this outcome will be the same in Canada when it achieves national organic standardization and regulation in 2006 (this issue is discussed in more detail on page 20 of this report).

Converted consumers are becoming good promoters of the benefits of sustainable agriculture. A good example of a global consumer group is the *Slow Food Movement*. *Slow Food* was founded in 1986 and now boasts 80,000 members in 100 countries. The group is concerned about food biodiversity and works to encourage agricultural practices that are respectful of the environment, of human beings and of taste. The group attracts membership from all walks of life, including royalty:

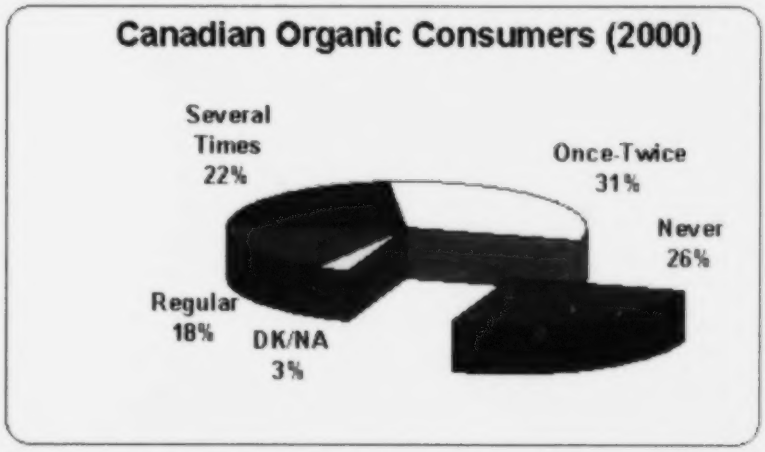
"I am an enormous admirer of the Slow Food Movement and of the remarkable work it has done to encourage sustainable agriculture, to increase appreciation of good food and to celebrate and share the knowledge — often developed over millennia — of the traditions involved with quality food production."
- HRH Charles, the Prince of Wales[8]

[8] See Slow Food. <http://store.slowfood.com/store/welcome_eng.lasso>.

Canadian Consumers

In the past, when defining the traditional organic consumer, those who purchased organic food as part of their beliefs and lifestyle would be the first to come to mind. As this niche market expands, more consumer segments are included; baby boomers, university students, and others who perceive organic food as a healthy, tasty or a chic alternative, are stepping to the till with their organic purchases in hand. There is no longer one simple distinction that can be made that represents those who purchase organic food. They are not that different from the Canadian population as a whole (with a few exceptions listed below), and we now see organic purchases cut across all demographics.

In 2001, an Environics International survey[9] listed the size of the organic retail food market in Canada at an estimated $650 million CDN (this number was estimated to have increased to $750 million by 2002 in another study, but it did not provide a comprehensive breakdown of those sales). When natural foods are added to that figure, the size becomes $1.45 billion CDN. While this represents only 1 – 2% of the total food market, the growth rates in North America for organic food are still in the double digits. As a result, organic products are now more readily found in Canadian mainstream retail chains such as Superstore, Safeway and Loblaws. Superstore has its own Presidents Choice line of organic foods that are simply characterized by a large trendy Organic "O." Add to this growing dynamic the entrance of Whole Foods, the leading US organic supermarket, into Canada in 2002. A result of this is organic products are more readily available to Canadian consumers than ever before.



Frequency of Organic Purchases by Canadians (Source: Environics)
Figure 2 – October 2000 Environics International survey

[9] See Environics International Ltd. (2001). Food issues monitor survey 2001. Subscribe for reports at <http://www.environics.net/eil/>.

The Environics International survey results (see Figure 2, p 14) show that:

- 18% of Canadians purchased organic food regularly (regular or heavy buyers).
- 22% purchased organic food several times (several times or light buyers).
- 31% have made organic food purchases once or twice.
- 26% (approximately 8 million) have never purchased any organic food.

The results of this are very encouraging, with 71% (approximately 22 million) of Canadians having at least *tried* organic foods. Depending upon the first experience of those consumers who tried organic products, the number of purchases is predicted to continue to climb. When one looks more closely at the top two groups — the total 40% (12 million) who purchase organic foods on a *regular* basis — there are a few interesting distinctions. The *regular buyers*, at 18% (5 million), are fairly representative of the general Canadian population, but with a few interesting characteristics:

- Sixty per cent are female.
- They are under-represented in the $60 to $80K income range.
- They are more likely to be from British Columbia (30%).
- They are less likely to be from either Saskatchewan (7%) or Alberta (12%).
- They are slightly more likely to be in the 25-34 age group than in the over-55 age group.

The *light buyers* — the 22% (7 million) who make purchases several times a year — more closely resemble the average Canadian consumer profile, with the following differences:

- They are under-represented at the $60 to 80K income range
- They are slightly more likely to be in the 18-34 year age group and slightly less likely to be over 55 years of age

The question[10] *"What is the single most important factor that drives demand for organic product?"* was addressed in a recent study and looked at Canadian consumers and their preferences and perceptions as they applied to organic and conventional food. The conclusion was clear as to why people choose organic over conventional food:

> *Concern for Human health and safety, which is a key factor influencing consumer preference for organic food, is consistent with observed deterioration in human health over time and, therefore, motivates consumers to buy organic food.*

[10] See Bonti–Ankomah, Samuel. (March 2006). Organic and Conventional Food: A Literature Review of the Economics of Consumer Preferences and Perceptions. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

In support of this, an AC Nielson survey in *Gourmet Retailer* magazine (Everage, 2003)[11] asked for "the reasons consumers purchase organic products":

- 32% believe organic products are healthier.
- 18% think they contain no pesticides.
- 11% cite better quality.
- 3% consider no Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO's) as a benefit.
- 3% buy to prevent allergic reactions.

With the consumer focus on health and sustainability, the organic sector must develop a strong and positive message that enforces those inherent qualities of organic food. This message should be carried through in promotional activities, and materials should be supported by factual studies carried out by reputable research associates.

Saskatchewan Consumer Opportunities

With the Saskatchewan population concentrated in two major cities and six regional centres, the marketing challenge is to reach and find dedicated organic consumers who are both health conscious and financially willing and able to pay a premium for their food. Saskatchewan Organic Producers will most likely be forced to look outside of provincial borders to ensure long-term viability, but they should ensure that they meet the demands of local consumers with home grown products rather than forcing them to purchase imported products.

According to the results of the studies mentioned above, the Saskatchewan sector needs to ensure that individual producers have the skills to carry the message, about the advantages of their products, to all levels of consumers and potential customers. (This need is not only specific to organic producers but is characteristic of all farmers in general). Producers tend to have a very high need in developing marketing and self-promotion skills, as was evidenced in the survey results of this study.

The sector as a whole should develop a general promotion policy that can be supported by all stakeholders. This process would be aided by the development of a Provincial Organic strategic plan that is supported by appropriate resources. The sector would benefit from having a dedicated person — perhaps an Executive Director or Provincial Coordinator who could compose press releases and act as a resource for media outlets. This person might also focus on developing needed materials, such as a directory of products and providers, to promote the sector in a more efficient and professional manner.

A great opportunity will arise once the national standard (see Standards and Regulations, page 21) is achieved, and the sector should be poised and ready to take full advantage of that opportunity. As witnessed by the example in the US with the

[11] See Everage, L. (2003). spring natural/organic handbook: state of the natural/organic industry. Gourmet Retailer Magazine. http://www.gourmetretailer.com/gourmetretailer/search

adoption of the National Organic Program, consumer confidence in organic products rose sharply and a there was a significant increase in sales of organic products as a result.

There is a need to develop a complete promotional plan to tie in with the ensuing logo developed for the Canadian Standard. The promotional plans should include a catchy slogan that easily instills, in the mind of the consumer, the idea that organic food is safe and healthy and, in particular, that Saskatchewan Organic food is the best. There are excellent promotional examples to look to, such as the "Drink Milk" campaign that featured prominent celebrities who proudly wear a milk mustache and espouse the health benefits of drinking milk. Once a promotional program is developed, it will provide individual organic producers with a base on which to expand upon when creating their individual marketing and promotional plans.

III. Marketing

Like conventional farmers, many organic producers find marketing to be one of the most difficult parts of farming. Some lack the skills required to carry out proper marketing, such as doing market research, dealing with the public or producing a sales plan; a general lack of clear market values for organic products can add to the problem. As a result, many producers become price takers.

Although demand for organic products has greatly increased, so has production. One concern, for a number of growers who participated in this study, was the potential for the increased organic acres to negatively impact the prices that they are currently receiving. Producers felt that, as a result of declining prices, they were being forced to move up the value chain to capture a greater return on their products or were settling for lower premiums.

Throughout the study, producers and other stakeholders continued to point in the direction of the need to develop their own marketing skills and abilities. In particular, those who want to move from selling a bulk commodity to farm gate, farmers markets or other retail sales opportunities are among those who require these skills the most.

The impression was that those who *are* adding value or *marketing direct to consumers* (27%) are doing *okay*, but those who were currently *not direct marketing* (73%) may be taking home less money. Of the 27% of producers who are marketing directly to the consumer, 68% of them are doing so at the *Farm Gate*, 16% were attending *Farmers' Markets*, and 11% were marketing through a *Retail Outlet*.

Producers feel they require additional skills to do a better job of marketing themselves. When producers were asked what areas they needed training in, *Marketing Raw and Processed Product* cumulatively score the highest over other areas such as *Production* and *Farm Management Skills*. Producers feel that they require *Farm Gate Marketing Skills* (77%), *Wholesale Marketing Skills* (73%), *Selling Skills* (71%) and *Exporting Skills* (66%). Another 45% indicated that they require training in conducting sales at *Farmers' Markets*.

An Organic Marketing Study[12] conducted by the Department of Agricultural Economics (AG EC) at the University of Saskatchewan (U of S) in April 2006 noted, in its recommendations, *a need to educate producers on various marketing options*. The study also noted that "there are significant differences in producer price and producer marketing cost" and that "difference in profit between different marketing routes can be quite large."

Ensuring that the farm has a marketing plan prior to production is one of the most critical steps to be taken. A market plan, put simply, will define the consumer, the products and the services they want most, what they are willing to pay for them, and what it will cost to produce them.

The Canadian Agriculture Skills Service (CASS) was initiated in Saskatchewan in June of 2005 under the Renewal Program of the Federal/Provincial Ag Policy Framework. CASS will provide financial support to qualifying producers who require training and further skill development. There is a great opportunity for organic producers to utilize this funding (along with other government programs) to further develop their marketing skills and to develop comprehensive marketing plans for their products.

Alternative or Direct Marketing

One alternative marketing scheme that is growing in popularity is that of incorporating agritourism activities to support product sales. Although agritourism is not for everyone, the organic producer may be more suited to this type of enterprise than conventional farmers would be. Because of the size of an organic producer's operation, and due to the fact that organic consumers are supporting a specific agricultural practice that is environmentally sustainable, organic consumers are more likely to want to see *how* their food is grown, as compared to consumers who buy heavily processed products in a supermarket.

Agritourism complements farm gate sales by adding to the customer's experience. The three Agri-tourism basics are: having something for the visitor to see, something for the visitor to do, and something for the visitor to buy. How well these elements are executed will determine the level of success. This type of farm enterprise may weather price fluctuations in a more stable manner, as a percentage of profits are drawn from sources other than the commodity itself. Agritourism ventures rely upon access to potential customers, and the more, the better; therefore, close proximity to larger urban centres, high traffic corridors, or other tourist attractions is very desirable.

Direct marketing, in any format, can give the farmer a larger share of the food dollar and possibly a higher return on each unit sold, offset to some extent by loss of economies of scale. For some farmers, adding value or marketing some minimally processed farm products directly to the consumer is a way of enhancing financial viability. Farmers who are unable to compete in, or are locked out of, distant markets can build a thriving local business. However, finding the right niche, and marketing directly to the public, are hard and labor–intensive jobs requiring time and effort. Creativity, ingenuity, sales

[12] See Organic Marketing Study. (April 2006). Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Saskatchewan. <http://organic.usask.ca>.

expertise, and the ability to deal with people in a pleasant and positive manner are skills that not everyone possesses.

Taking the next step up the value chain with direct or indirect marketing, or by co-operating with their neighbors through marketing co-operatives, is a natural move for organic producers.

Marketing Cooperatives

Joint marketing ventures, such as cooperatives or corporations, have proved successful for producers that lack financial resources to carry out pricey marketing schemes or who alone do not have the mass of necessary product to meet demand.

Northwest Organic Community Mills Co-operative Ltd. was incorporated in February of 2003 as a New Generation Co-operative. The Cooperative offers processing services such as cleaning, grading and bagging, as well as marketing services to members and other organic producers, providing them with access to new and established markets.

The Cooperative is home too *Old School Organics* consumer products, which markets Stone Ground Flour, Whole Grains and Processed Grains, in products such as Pancake mix, Muffin mix and Multi-grain Cereals. This group has a good start on a venture that may prove very successful.

What *Old School Organics* lacks in financial resources or expertise, they make up for in enthusiasm and commitment. This may be a good example to look to in the future, as they move their product line forward and access consumers directly with the *Old School Organics* line.

Ottawa's Countryside[13] is an excellent example of a marketing cooperative that involved 60 farm operators in a $125,000 advertising campaign in 2005. The group devised a website, initiated a toll-free number, printed road maps, and conducted a media campaign that included Newsprint, magazine and television ads. The use of regular press releases brought free editorial coverage to the group, who were featured in Canada's National "Marketing Magazine."

Those producers wanting to start a Marketing Cooperative may be challenged by knowing where to start with establishing a coop, securing sustainable funding and experiencing difficulties in convincing farm operators and processors to work together. The initial start-up process must include securing required funding. Whereas individual operations may not qualify for financial support, once banded together, producers can

[13] See www.Ottawascoutnryside.ca.

access programs such as the Farm Improvement and Marketing Co-operatives Loans Act (FIMCLA), Co-operative Development Assistance Program (CDAP), and the Agricultural New Generation Co-operatives Program (ANGen). The benefits of working together in a marketing cooperative include the ability to leverage small amounts of money into greater buying or spending power. The media and the general public are more often attentive to a professional level of products and communications. Establishing a marketing cooperative may allow producers to hire and direct staff that otherwise would not be attainable to them individually.

An excellent model of producers working together to capture market share (although not certified organic) is *Canadian Prairie Lamb Inc.* The company was created to market value-added lamb products to consumers through retail outlets, hotel, restaurant and institutional markets throughout Canada. The project was initiated by the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board (SSDB) in 1998, during a strategic planning workshop that prompted the group to investigate marketing of value-added or processed lamb products. With research funding, preliminary test recipes were developed and consumer testing was conducted. This led to a market feasibility study, further product development, process development, and a value-chain analysis. *Canadian Prairie Lamb* will wrap up a share offering on June 30, 2006, and funds raised will be directed towards marketing and working capital. The development of a provincial toll processor in the province has been crucial to the success and future growth of *Canadian Prairie Lamb* and may hold opportunities for Organic Livestock producers as well (contingent upon the organic certification of the processor).

Another good example of an Organic Marketing Co-operative outside of Canada is the *Tuscarora Organic Growers Cooperative* in Hustontown, Pennsylvania, USA.[14] To better serve their customers, Tuscarora members gather together several times a year to decide how many and what kind of crops will be grown. Though planting decisions are not binding, the growers usually fulfill their obligations. Jim Crawford, who helped found Tuscarora in 1988, has spent the last 30 years growing several different kinds of organic vegetables on 25 acres at his New Morning Farm. Crawford feels the main reason for the cooperative's success is that his customers know who is growing their food. This marketing co-operative has built strong alliances with the restaurant industry and is a preferred supplier of the first organically certified restaurant in the United States. 'Restaurant Nora', an upscale, white-tablecloth dinning establishment in Washington D.C., along with its companion 'Asia Nora', became the first in the nation to be certified organic by the Oregon Tilth Association in 1999. The restaurant owner/chef feels that having reliable suppliers such as the Tuscarora Organic Growers Cooperative is key to the success of the restaurants. The co-op is responsive to her (the owner) and her customers needs.

A variation in the marketing landscape for Western Canadian organic producers will be the proposed entrance of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) into direct sales and marketing of organic grains with their international customer base. The CWB will soon

---

14 See Iowa Public Television Market to Market report. (Recorded February 21, 2003). Tuscarora Organic Growers Cooperative. Hustontown, Pennsylvania.

launch a pilot project in organic product marketing with a few chosen producers participating in a marketing pool on a voluntary basis.[15] Depending upon the outcomes of this project, there may be more marketing opportunities, especially for producers who are not already engaged in value-adding or direct sales of production, in addition to those that already exist.

Standards & Regulations

The United States implemented national standards in October of 2002. Consumer interest has enjoyed good momentum as new organic production and marketing systems evolve. The national symbol, USDA Organic (as seen at left), assures consumers that a product has been grown, handled and processed in a certified organic manner that meets with stringent National standards. Canadian standards and labeling will ensure the ability of Saskatchewan producers to access the EU and other markets, as well as grow their own markets here at home.

The adoption of Canadian National Organic Standards and Regulations are seen as a very crucial requirement for the sector to move forward. A regulated national standard will instill consumer confidence and enable producers to gain access to critical export markets. According to the standards, there must be nationally identifiable and recognized labels on food products. Canada was informed that its organic food products would lose access to the European Union market unless a national regulatory system acceptable to the EU was put in place by the end of 2005.[16] This deadline has been extended to the end of 2006, and the need for such a requirement was echoed by numerous participants and stakeholders who participated in the study.

IV. Organic Education and Training

Growth and development of the organic sector in many countries around the world has been propelled by a commitment to continued organic education, research and the development of markets. There are plenty of good examples of organic research and educational institutions that include a focus on organic producer education as part of their mandate.

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) in Frick (Switzerland) and FiBL Germany are leading competence centres for research and consultancy on organic agriculture in Europe. Alongside practical research, a high priority is given to transferring knowledge into agricultural practice through advisory work, training courses

---

[15] See Youngdahl, Donna. Organic Marketing Manager, Canadian Wheat Board. Winnipeg MB.

[16] See Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC and Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). Cost benefit analysis of the effects of federal regulation for organic products: final report. <http://www.cog.ca/documents/cost_benefit_federal_regulation_part3.pdf>.

and expert reports, as well as various modern methods of documentation (magazine, data sheet, reference book and Internet).

Organic Centre Wales[17], its partners, and other organizations organize a range of events to provide opportunities for farmers, including one-day training courses, one-stop shops for farmers considering conversion, and tours of demonstration farms.

The US Website on Educational and Training Opportunities in Sustainable Agriculture[18] lists courses, workshops, classes and various training opportunities in 49 states of the U.S. Reference is given to all opportunities presented by the various educational institutions, if the programs are focused on sustainable agriculture practices. In the state of California alone, 26 institutions offer training and learning opportunities.

In Canada, there are similar programming opportunities available, although they are not as numerous as in the US. These programs will be explored more fully, later on in this document, under *Training Needs Assessment* section *IV Educational Models & Opportunities* (p. 63).

With all of these resources and program opportunities, it is very surprising to find that until most recently only one Organic Degree program has been available in North America, that being a Canadian course: The University of Guelph, Department Of Plant Agriculture in the Ontario Agriculture College, offers a Bachelor of Science Degree with the Organic Agriculture Major distinction. On June 18, 2006, the Washington State University announced that it will also offer an Organic major, with the Organic Agriculture Systems major, through the College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resources. The need for a Prairie-based degree program is discussed later on in the report as well.

As evidenced in the results of this study, organic producers across Saskatchewan have predominantly practiced *self-directed* learning principals. Self-directed learners desire control, freedom and flexibility when it comes to gathering new skills and knowledge. 89% of producers involved in this study gather their information from other organic growers, and 82% rely heavily on books and publications to support their self-directed learning endeavors.

Few formal educational opportunities have existed for Saskatchewan organic producers, so the mentoring process has been the learning method, perhaps by default, to some degree. Through an informal mentoring process, experienced organic growers work with those who are in transition and set their own learning pace and structure. Many producers have learned their skills by standing at the sides of their fathers or grandfathers. Often a senior organic producer gives selflessly of valuable time in order to lend a hand to a neighbor who is transitioning to organic production practices. In the beginning, the learning curve is very steep, and the regiment of paperwork is an

---

17 Organic Centre Wales Institute of Rural Sciences, University of Wales Aberystwyth, Ceredigion, SY233AL http://www.organic.aber.ac.uk/events/

18 http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/AFSIC_pubs/edtr.htm#Colleges

onerous task. Not everyone is able to manage in an organic production system, as the challenges are many.

Organic producers need other options, as traditional role models may no longer exist or are hard to find, or they lack resources to continue to offer their services freely.

Challenges for the more experienced organic producer include a lack of pertinent research on specific weed control, intercropping, biological pest controls, and information on advanced organic agronomics. The seasoned organic producer is conducting his or her own trials on-farm and attempting to learn through the practical processes. A great deal of information sharing amongst producers is common, and informal mentoring has played a strong role in getting new producers up and running.

Existing Support Systems

Member and stakeholder groups — including certifying bodies, Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (SOD), and the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (OACC) Prairie office, to name a few — have contributed many of the educational resources available.

Certifying bodies (CB's) exert a fair deal of energy in assisting new clients, in the first few years, with the certification process. Annual update meetings, chapter meetings, field days and foreign certification sessions offer learning and networking opportunities. The visit by the Organic Inspector to one's farm also presents a good opportunity to add to one's knowledge of organic practices and requirements, by utilizing the outcome of the audit as those next steps for learning and development.

The existing Organic Production Manual, created by the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate, is a valuable resource, according to producers, but is in need of updating. It requires additional resources on topic areas such as Organic Livestock and Organic Horticulture. This resource should also be made available in a CD-ROM format to accommodate learners who prefer using computer technology.

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) have designated organic specialists and support staff who play an important supporting role with producers. Through the Agriculture Knowledge Centre (AKC), producers may access information over the telephone, which complements survey results indicating that 50% of producers who participated prefer to communicate by telephone. SAF staff also act as facilitators & supporters on Organic committees and assist with Annual Update meetings.

When looking at formalized learning activities, however, we find that within the borders of Saskatchewan there are few formal educational opportunities to aid the organic producer. There are several existing organic-specific programs across Canada, including some with Prairie roots in Manitoba; however, none, in and of themselves, address all of the needs presented in this study by the Organic Producers of Saskatchewan.

Institutions such as the University of Saskatchewan currently have no degree program or major available for organic production, and no certificate program, but it has recently offered a class in Weed Ecology, which is a course available in the *Certificate of*

Specialization in Organic Agriculture at the Nova Scotia Agricultural College (NSAC)[19] and in conjunction with the OACC.

With the fairly recent addition of a Prairie office (2003) of the OACC, there has been marked improvement in terms of research and extension work conducted in Saskatchewan. The limitations of the OACC Prairie office are apparent, with less than two full-time staff and a mandate to cover the three Prairie Provinces. The OACC has been successful in coordinating a number of research projects, including the *Best Organic Management Practices Study (BOMPS)* done in 2005/2006. This work, which involved speaking with 34 senior experienced organic producers to discuss crop and livestock practices, will be compiled into fact sheets for three soil zones in Saskatchewan. Organic producers indicated that BOMPS, and studies such as, this are key resources for them.

Organic courses are offered on the Prairies by the Assiniboine Community College,[20] based out of Brandon, Manitoba. The Organic Agriculture Certificate, the Organic Crop Inspector and Organic Livestock Inspector are offered by distance with some weekend practicums. A couple of classes from this program were offered early in 2006 by the Carlton Trail College in Humboldt, but were cancelled due to lack of enrolment.

OACC web-based courses are available to farmers and can be taken from home, providing proper computer connections can be achieved. The courses are offered by five host Universities with the NSAC delivering the core courses and granting the Certificate of Specialization in Organic Agriculture. At least two core courses must be taken at the NSAC in order to qualify for the certificate. Only one course is offered through the University of Saskatchewan, as noted earlier.

A comprehensive review of current programs available in Canada and the potential curriculum for a Saskatchewan-based program are presented in the *Training Needs Assessment* section of this report (p. 26).

V. Fractionation

Concern over the division within the organic sector is apparent amongst its members. This divisiveness may be preventing the sector from moving forward and realizing its full potential. Some groups are extremely divided in their ideas regarding policy and strategic direction for the organic sector. There is a lack of cohesive momentum among its stakeholder groups, which include member organizations, certifiers, commissions and other stakeholders. There is a need to build consensus amongst these groups. A Provincial Organic Strategy that ties in closely with a National Strategic Plan would aid the sector in its growth. The ability for the sector to promote itself is hampered by the undisclosed information that is required to generate sound statistics. Without the complete picture, it is difficult for lobbies to achieve their goals.

---

[19] See Nova Scotia Agricultural College. Certificate of Specialization in Organic Agriculture. <http://nsac.ca/cde/courses/DE/Organic/default.asp>.

[20] See Assiniboine Community College. Brandon Manitoba. <http://public.assiniboine.net/Default.aspx>.

VI. Commission

A recent vote was held amongst members of the organic community to determine the support for a Saskatchewan Organic Commission. The vote to establish the check-off fund was passed on March 1, 2006. The creation of the Commission is still in the early stages and its bylaws and policies must gain approval. The creation of this new Commission is another highly controversial action of the organic sector. Its outcome is being greeted with excitement by some and skepticism by others. There is some concern that, by splitting the money off from groups such as the Saskatchewan Pulse Growers check off fund, and the Western Grain Research Fund, the Commission will elicit fewer research dollars and will only add to the overall administrative costs of operating separate funds. Others see its creation as a necessity in order to meet the 2010 strategic goals for the organics sector (as envisioned by COG and the OACC) to increase organic production to 10% of total agriculture and to capture 10 % of retail food sales by that time. The Commission may play a significant role in the future development of research and educational materials for the organic growers of Saskatchewan.

VII. Other

It is difficult to farm without the support of a good lender. There is a general lack of understanding about the organic industry by lenders and financial institutions. Agricultural lenders are not familiar with organic production systems, practices and marketing, and are therefore reluctant to act as creditors and investors. It would be beneficial to producers if meetings could be held with these institutions to better acquaint them with the organic sector.

The Saskatchewan Government announced the appointment of a Legislative Secretary[21] for Organic Farming on May 26, 2006, recognizing the contribution of the sector to the province's economy. The Secretariat will provide a leadership role with respect to government programming and services for the sector, and will liaise between government and organic stakeholders. Initially, there will be an examination of issues affecting the growth of the organic sector and potential solutions to address constraints. An interim report is expected to be delivered by the Legislative Secretary by the summer of 2007.

[21] http://www.gov.sk.ca/newsrel/releases/2006/05/26-428.html, accessed May 2006.

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

I. Producer Needs as Identified by Producer Survey, Focus Groups and Consultations with Producers

Survey Background

A producer survey was devised by Sage, with input from the steering committee as well as other industry professionals. The survey consisted of two tiers of questions: *Tier One* contained 16 base questions and *Tier Two* contained an additional 11 questions for a total of 27 questions. All those surveyed were offered the first 16 questions, with a total of 162 producers completing this portion of the survey. Tier two surveys, with a total of 27 questions, were completed by 71 producers. In every case, the producer could choose not to answer a particular question; this choice was reflected through "*other*" or "*don't know*" answers.

Participation was voluntary, with producers being contacted by telephone, fax, at meetings, or with producers contacting the consultant directly. Notifications were sent out to sector stakeholders by the steering committee to explain the study and ask for co-operation (see Appendix C, p. 95). Sage corresponded directly with organizations (Appendix D, p. 96) and provided information and invitations to members to participate in focus groups or the survey (Appendix E, p. 97). The survey (see Appendix F, p. 98) was conducted during the months of February, March and early April, prior to seeding.

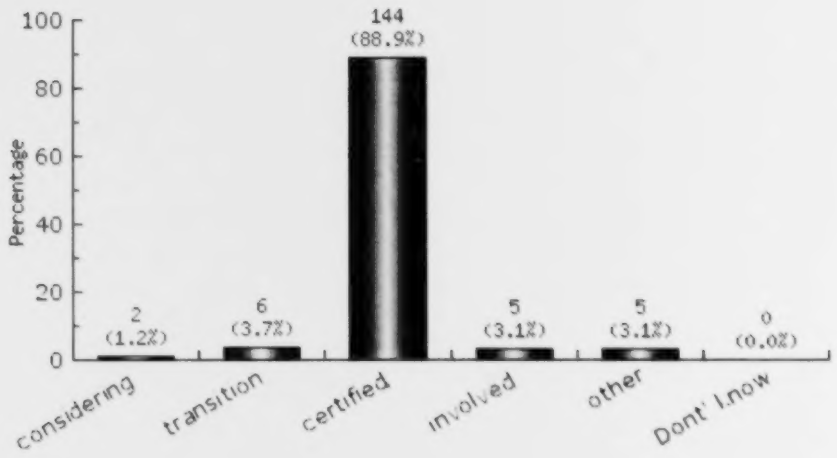
A Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food press release (Appendix G, p. 103) was issued on April 3, 2006 on the study and was picked up by a number of papers, including the Western Producer. Radio stations in Yorkton (CJGX) and in Melfort (CJVR) broadcast announcements on focus groups held in their listening areas.

The following is a summary of responses to the survey, with figures rounded to the nearest percentage point. Based on the figures of 1,245 Organic producers in the province of Saskatchewan, and on 162 completing *Tier One*, there is a 7.2% margin for error when referring to the statistical information. This margin for error increases when looking to *Tier Two* answers, based on the participation of 71 producers. In many cases, the producer was able to select more than one option or answer to a question, so total percentages may or will exceed 100%. Participation in the survey was completely voluntary, and producers could choose not to answer any portion of the survey questions.

Farm Information

When asked *which best describes their current status*, 89% of those surveyed stated they are *certified*; 4% are *in transition;* 3% are *involved in organics*; 1% are *considering certification* and another 3% are *no longer involved, not certified this year* or are a *retired organic farmer.*

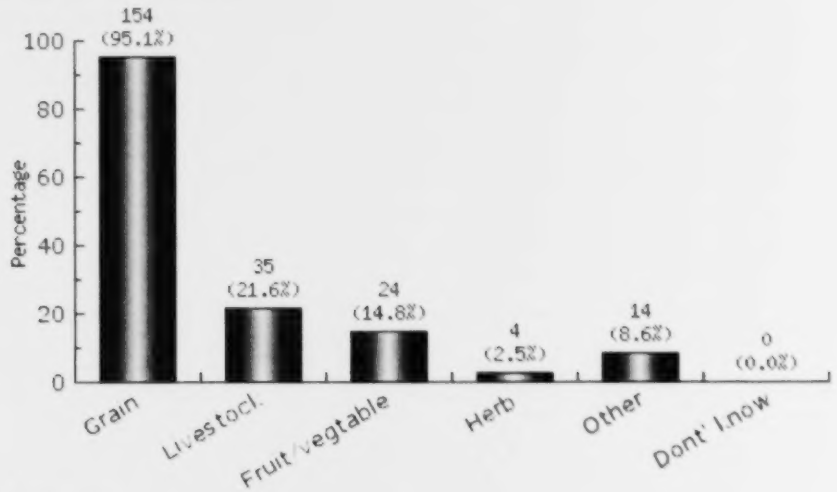
Current status:



162 responses

Commodities produced by those surveyed include 95% *grain*; 22% *livestock*; 15% *fruit & vegetable*; 3% *herbs* and 9% of *other organic commodities including, spices, hay, clover, lentils, and poultry.* Producers tend to grow a combination of products, with grain as the primary commodity.

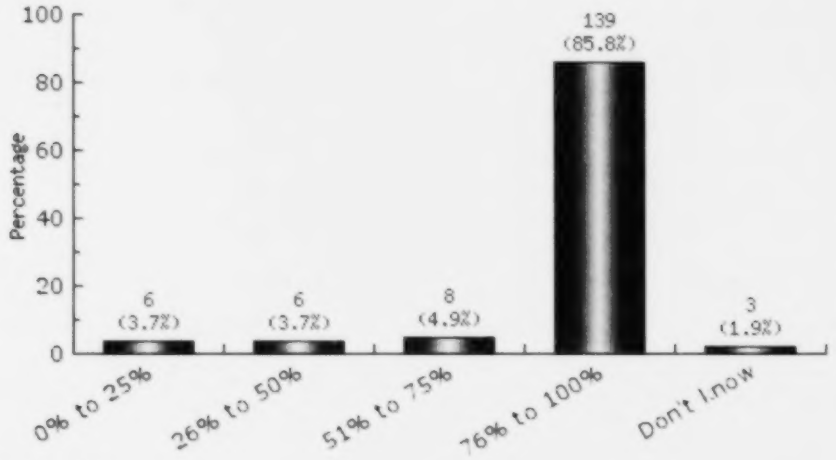
Commodities produced:



162 responses

When asked *what percentage of their farm production is dedicated to organics*, 86% indicated that *76 to 100%* of their production is dedicated organic. 5% dedicate *51 to 75%* of their production to organics; 4% dedicate *26 to 50%*, and 4% dedicate *0 to 25%* to organic production.

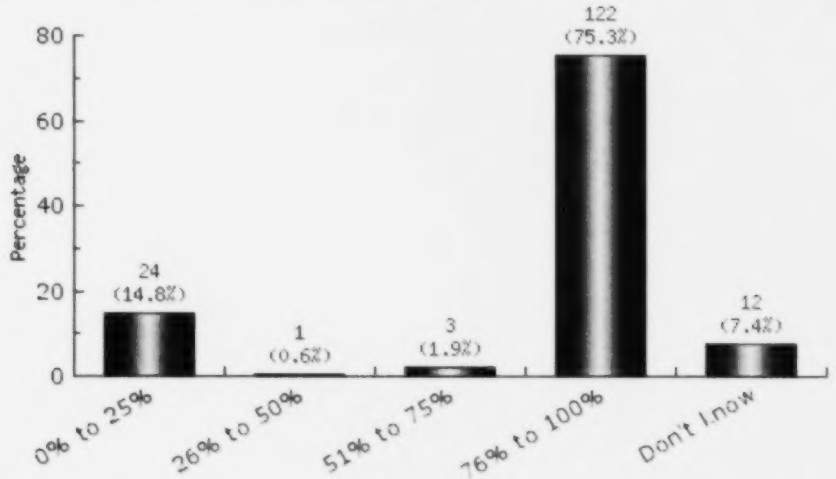
Percentage of farm production dedicated to organics:



162 responses

When asked *what percentage of their farm production they plan to dedicate in the future*, only 75% said they plan to dedicate *76 to 100%* to organics; 2% will commit *51 to 75%* of their production to organics; 15% will dedicate *0 to 25%*; less than 1% will dedicate *26 to 50%* and another 7% *do not know* what they will do in the future.

Percentage of farm production dedicated to organics in the future:

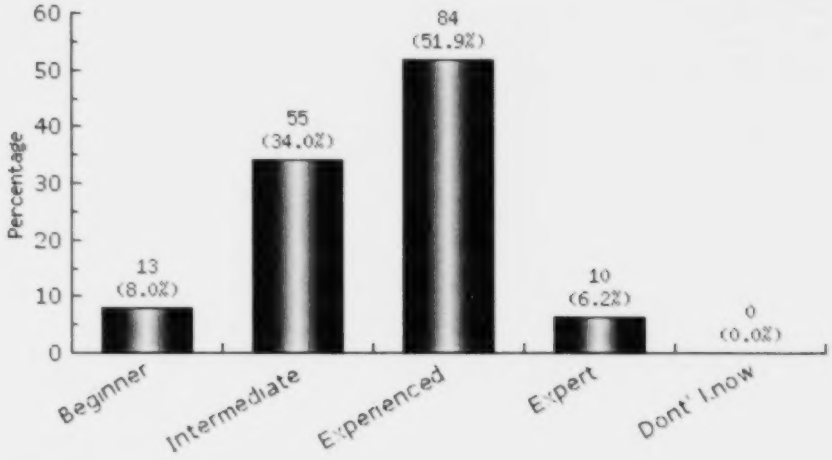


162 responses

Producer Skill Level

When asked to classify their current level of skills, producers surveyed rated themselves as follows: 52% of the producers classify themselves as having an *experienced* level of skill in organic production; 34% classify themselves as *intermediate;* 8% feel they have *beginner* level skills and 6% feel they have an *expert* level of skill.

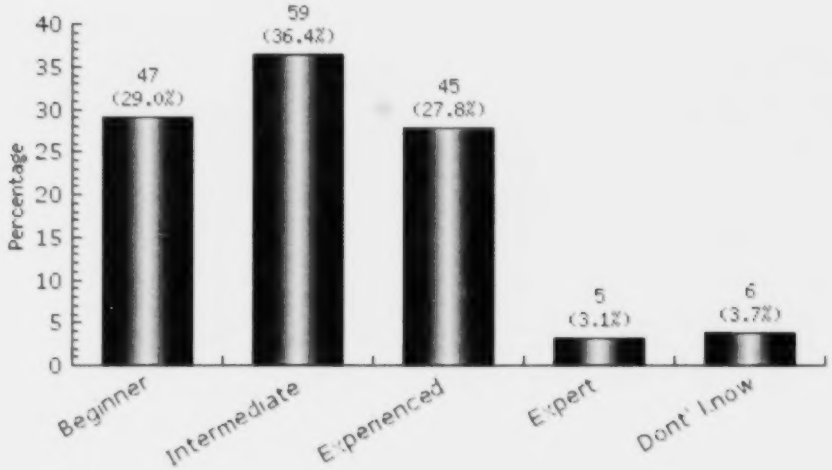
Producer skill level — Organic Production:



162 responses

When asked to classify their level of skills in the area of organic product marketing, the number who are at the *beginner* level increases to 29% and *intermediate* to 37%. *Experienced* drops to 28% and only 3% feel they have *expert* level skills with organic product marketing. Another 4% *do not know* where to classify them selves.

Producer skill level — Organic Product Marketing:

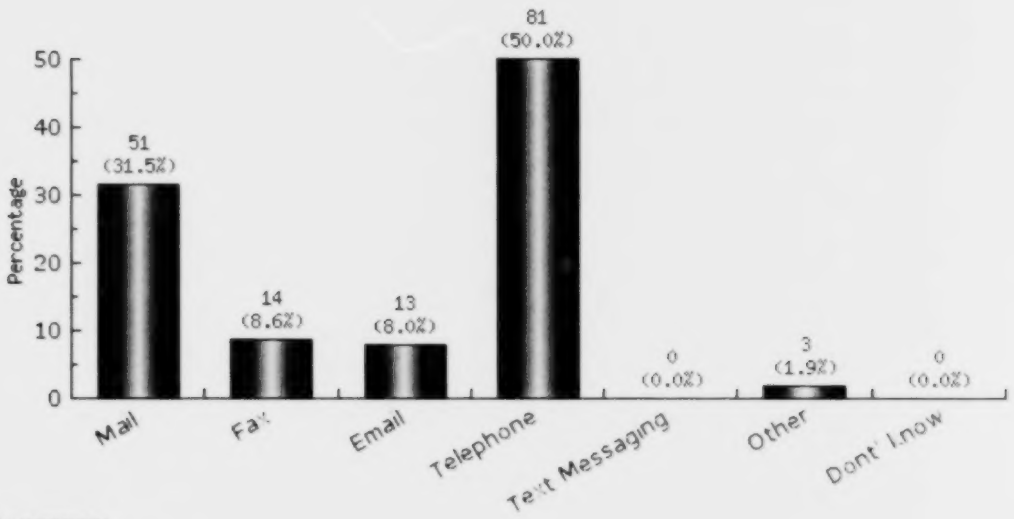


162 responses

Communication and Technology

When asked what *their preferred method of communication is*, 50% selected *telephone*, 32% chose *mail*, 9% *fax*, 8% *e-mail* and 2% chose *other* methods, such as one-on-one conversation.

Preferred method of communication:



162 responses

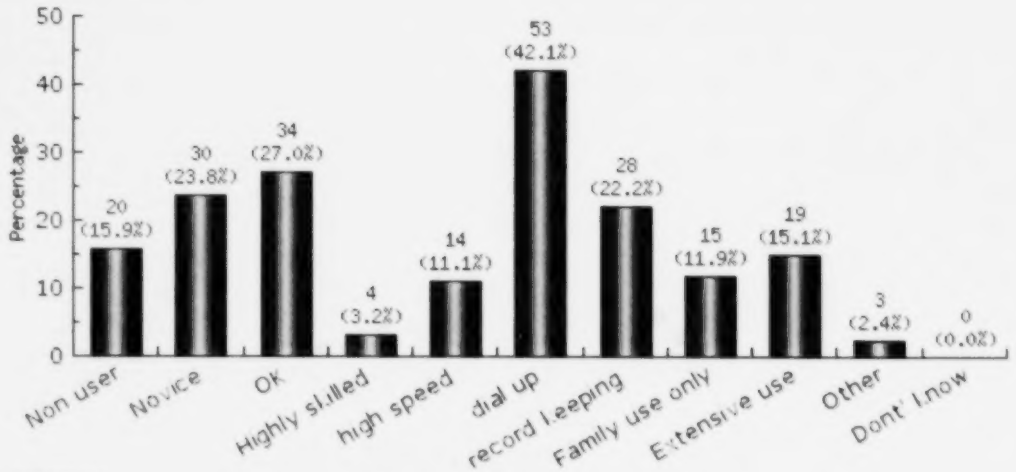
Out of the 162 study participants, 126 or 78% said they *own a computer*, while 22% *do not own a computer.*

Producers that own a computer:

162 responses

Of the 126 who said they own a computer, 24% have *novice* skills, 27% have *okay* skills, and 3% are *highly* skilled. 22% are using their computer for *record keeping* on the farm, 15% use their system *extensively*, and 12% state that it is for *family use only*. Another 2% indicate *other* uses such as for organic research. 42% indicate they have *dial-up connections* on their farm, and 11% have *high-speed connections*.

Skills, access and use related to computer use of producers that own a computer:



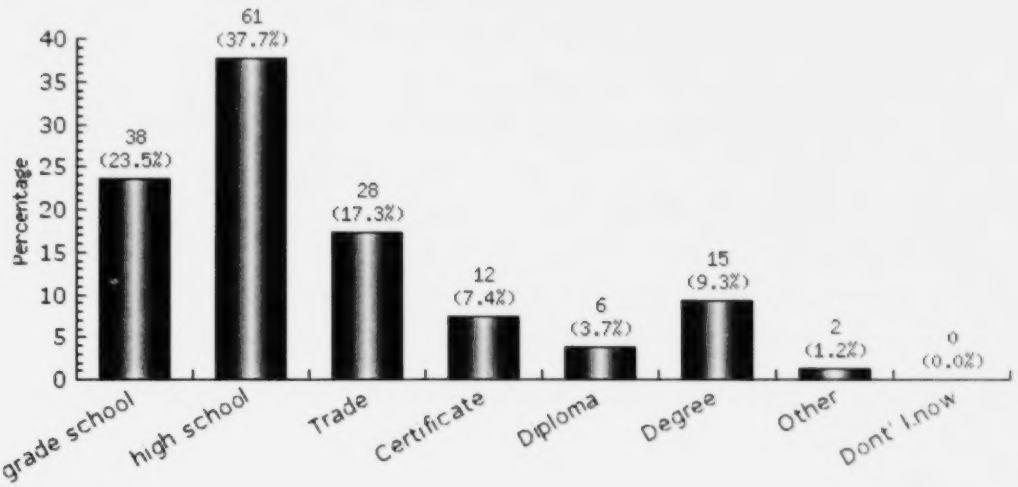
126 responses

Level of Education

When discussing the level of education completed, the study participants indicated that 24% have *completed grade school*, 38% have *completed high school*, 17% have a *trade*, 7% hold a *certificate*, 4% have a *diploma* and 9% have a *degree*, while 1% indicate that they have completed *some university*.

Since some participants responded by selecting their highest level of education achieved, it can be assumed that the number of those who have completed high school is also reflected in those with degrees, diplomas, certificates and, in some cases, trades. This would mean that more than half of the respondents (58%) have actually completed high school. (See graph, p. 32)

Level of Education:

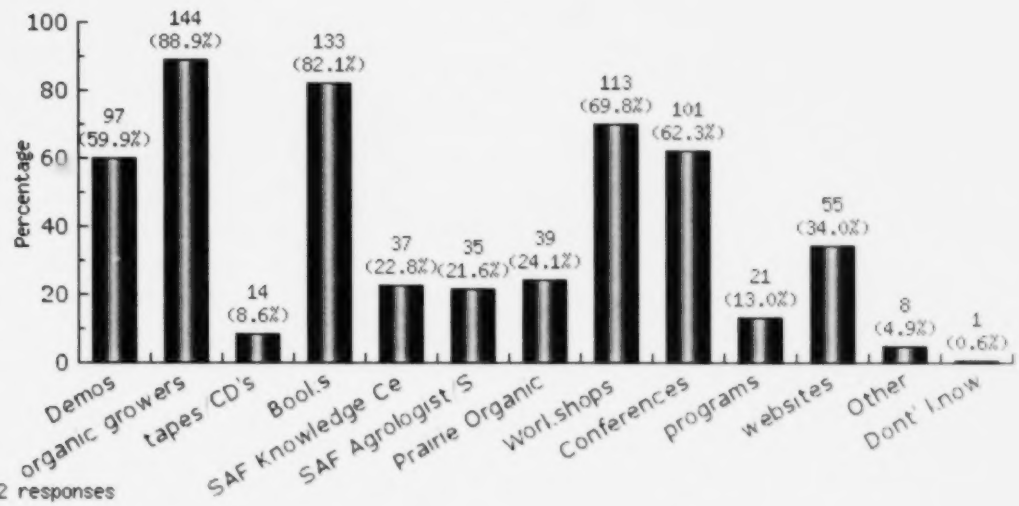


162 responses

Current Methods of Gathering Knowledge

When asked *how they currently gather knowledge required to adopt and apply organic practices*, 89% said they *gain their knowledge from fellow organic producers*. The next common method chosen was *from books and publications*, at 82%; followed by *workshops*, 70%; and *organic conferences*, 62%.

Current methods of gathering knowledge:

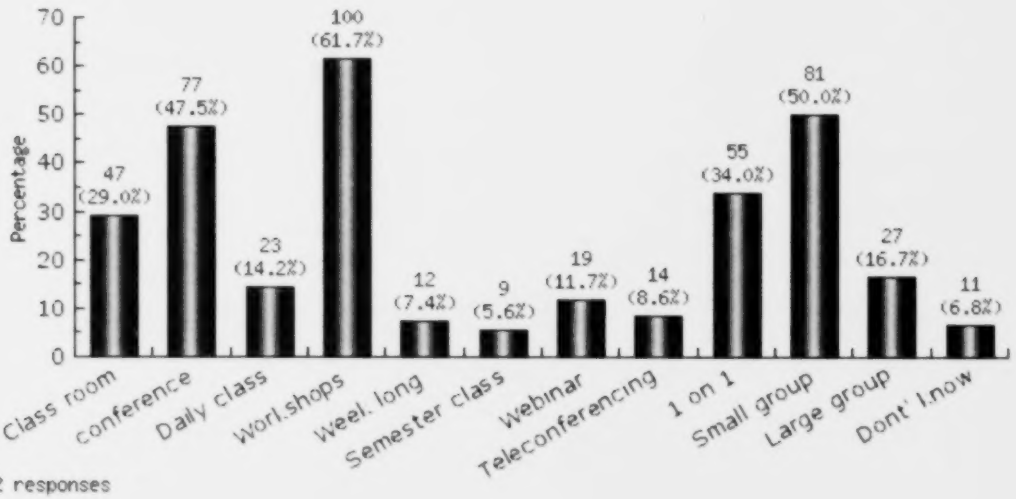


162 responses

When asked *What type of training setting do you prefer?*, organic producers indicated a very strong preference for workshop training events, with 62% of those surveyed indicating that they *prefer workshops*. *Conferences* were the next highest selection, with 47% selecting this option over *classroom* at 29%. *Small group settings* were also important, with 50% choosing this over *one-on-one session* at 34%. This may be indicative of the fact that there are few other opportunities to gather skills and knowledge on organic production systems; or, it could be more reflective of the age group and stage of life that many of the respondents are at. The group surveyed was generally mature respondents who chose *daily classes*, at 14%, over a *semester class*, which only scored with 6% of the respondents.

It is interesting to note that 12% (19) of the respondents were interested in a *Webinar* program. This would encompass all those who have *high speed Internet* (14), as well as a few who are on a *dial-up system* (53). Another 9% were interested in utilizing *teleconferencing* to achieve their learning needs.

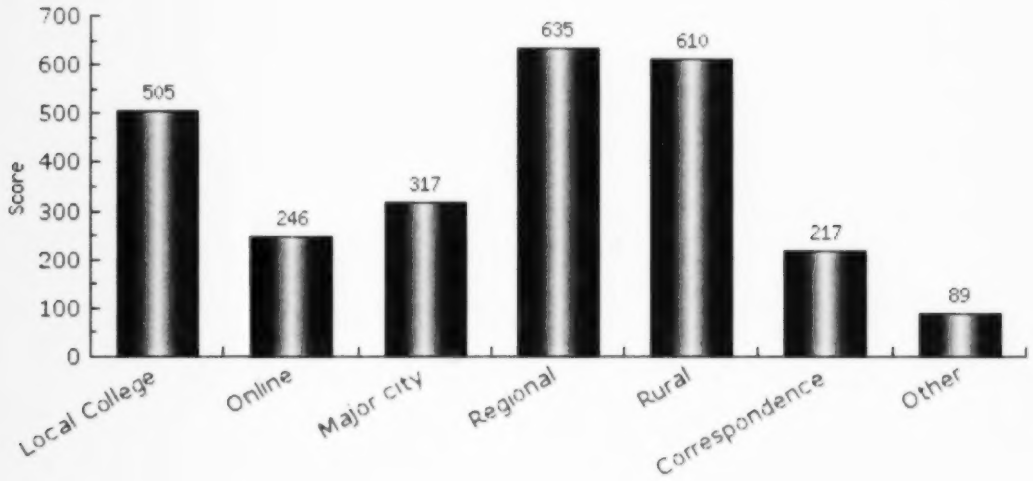
Preferred settings for training:



162 responses

Producers were asked *where they would prefer to attend training* and to *rank their choices from 1 to 7*. *A regional setting* ranks first, but just by narrow margin over *rural*, which can be interpreted to be the same type of setting, given the size of some regional locations. *A local college* is ranked as third, but could also fall into the first and second rankings, as they might be located relationally and rurally. Ranked 4th is *a major city*; 5th is *online;* 6th is *by correspondence;* and 7th is *other*, which encompasses such comments as *where there is a babysitter, at a central meeting point, doesn't matter, or not in favour of training.*

Preferred locations for training:



Areas of Training Needed

When taking a look at areas where producers require training, the survey focuses on three areas. These include Production, Marketing and Farm Management. Each of these areas is then further broken down into specific categories.

Production

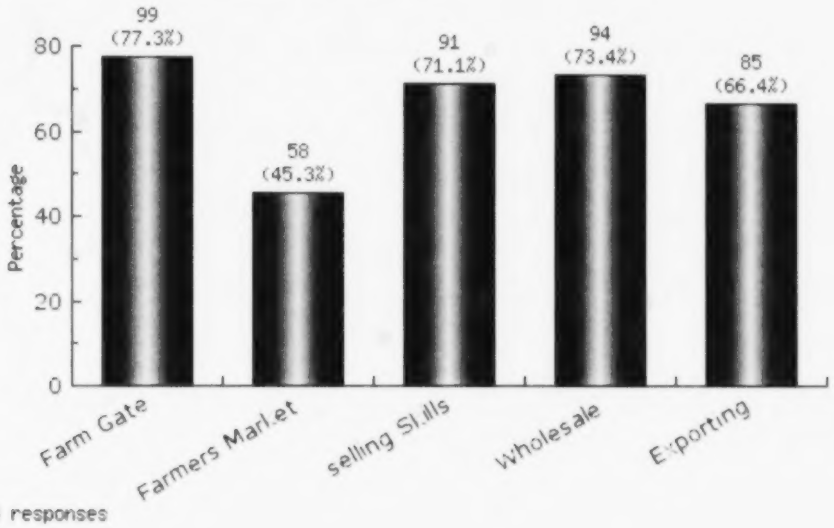
A total of 129 producers indicated that they require training in *organic production.* The majority of those, 81%, selected *organic crop production* as the area they require training in. 69% selected *organic land husbandry*, and 30% chose *organic livestock husbandry* as their area of need. Other areas that producers specified they require training in included horticulture and dairy.

Types of training producers require for Organic Production:

Marketing

When looking at marketing raw and processed product, producers were most compelled to indicate that they require training assistance with *farm gate marketing skills*, at 77%; *wholesale marketing skills*, 73%; *selling skills* in general, 71%; and *exporting skills* 66%. Another 45% indicate that they require training in conducting sales at a *farmers' market*.

Types of training producers require for Marketing:

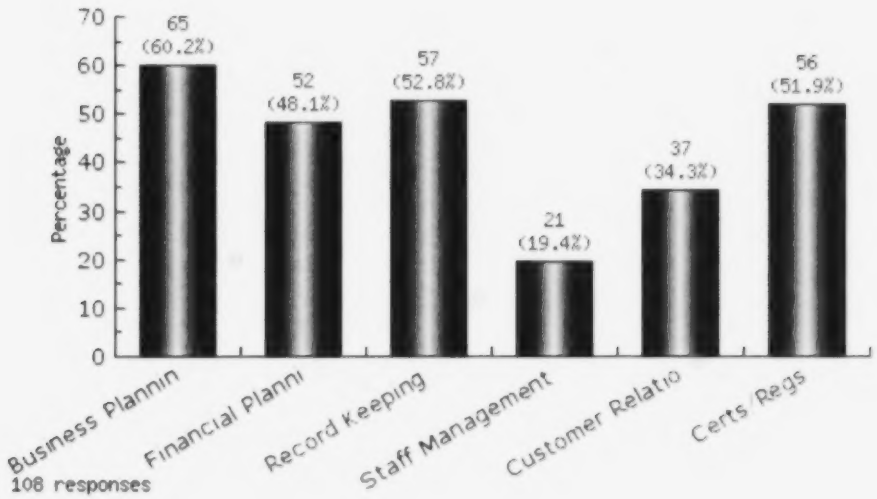


128 responses

Farm Management

In the area of Farm Management Skills, producers were asked to *indicate those areas in which they require training;* respondents had six areas to choose from. *Strategic business planning* topped the list, with 60% indicating this as their highest need. *Record keeping*, at 53%, and *meeting certification and regulatory requirements*, at 52%, were closely ranked, likely due to the fact that producers answering saw them as one in the same; both skills require an arduous amount of work for organic producers. *Customer relations* training, 34%, and *staff management*, 19%, were the two lowest-ranking selections in the farm management question, and the two lowest-ranking selections in the whole area of training need (see graph, p. 36).

Types of training producers require for Farm Management:

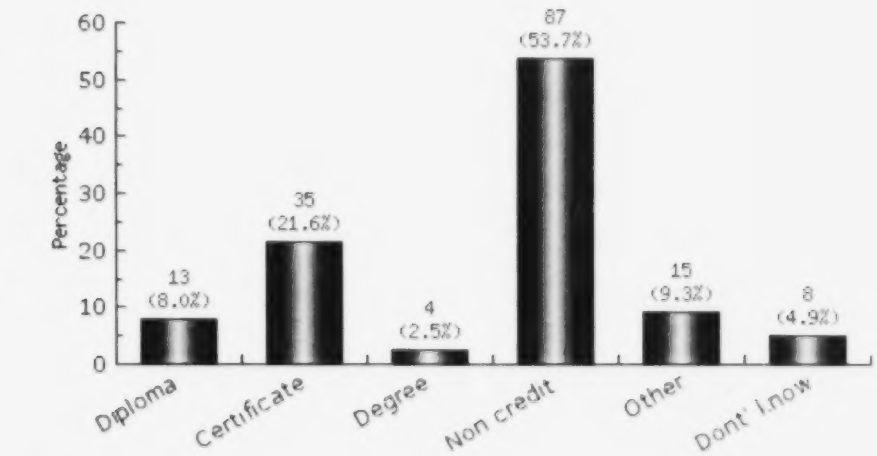


108 responses

Accreditation

When asked *what level of recognition they would want to achieve through training*, 54% indicated that a *non-credit* program would be sufficient. 22% would like to see a *Certificate*, 8% a *Diploma*, and 3% a *Degree*. It is Sage's view that the low number of responses for Degree is reflective of the group surveyed (active farmers) and may not be the best indicator of whether or not a degree program is warranted. Comments given in the *other* category include: *depends what the training is worth to them; would not take this type of training;* and that they were *not certain they needed recognition.*

Levels of recognition / accreditation producers want to achieve through training:

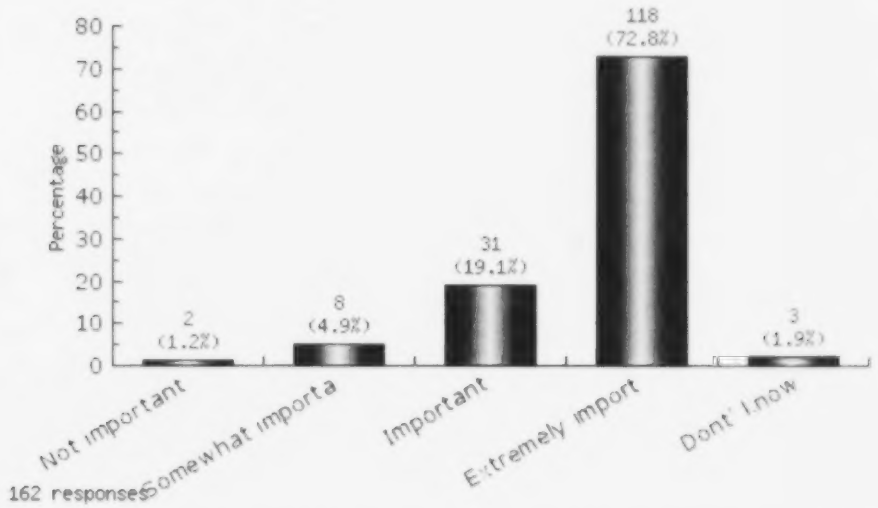


162 responses

Certification & Regulations

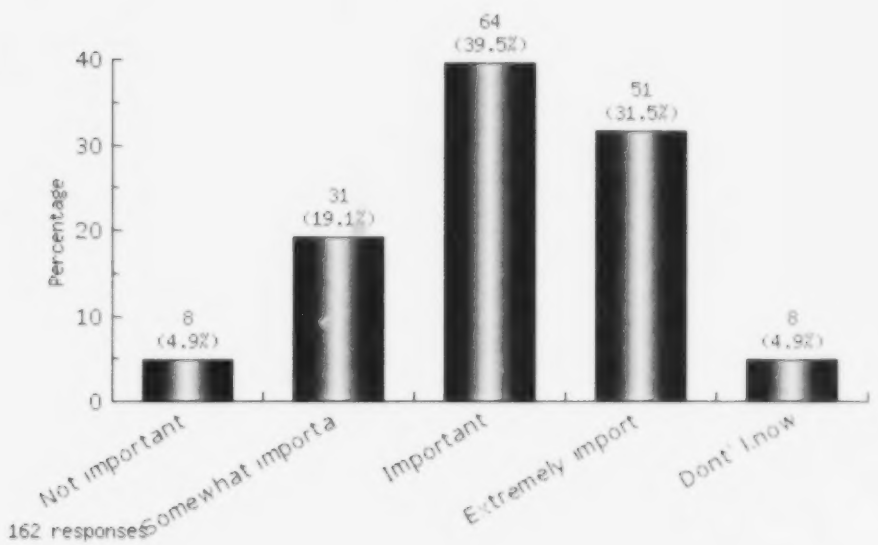
When asked to rate the importance of *organic certification*, 73% rate it as being *extremely important*; 19% as *important*; 5% as *somewhat important;* and 1% and 2% as *not important* and *do not know*, respectively.

Importance of Organic Certification:



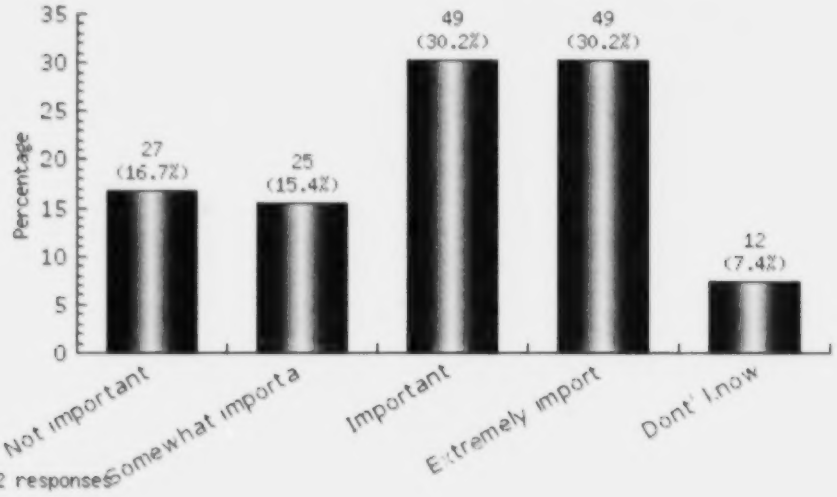
Environmental farm plans are considered *important* by 40% and *extremely important* by 32% of the respondents. Another 19% feel that they are *somewhat important*, and 5% feel that they are *not important* or *do not know*.

Importance of environmental farm plans:



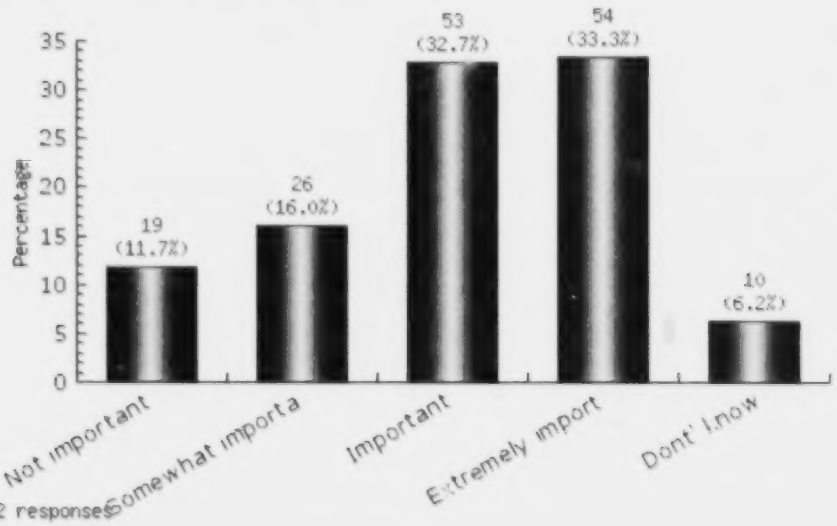
On-farm food safety certification is considered both *extremely important* and *important* by 30% of the respondents surveyed. 15% feel that they are *somewhat important*, while 17% feel that they are *not important*. Another 7% *do not know* if on-farm food safety certification is important to them.

Importance of on-farm food safety certification:



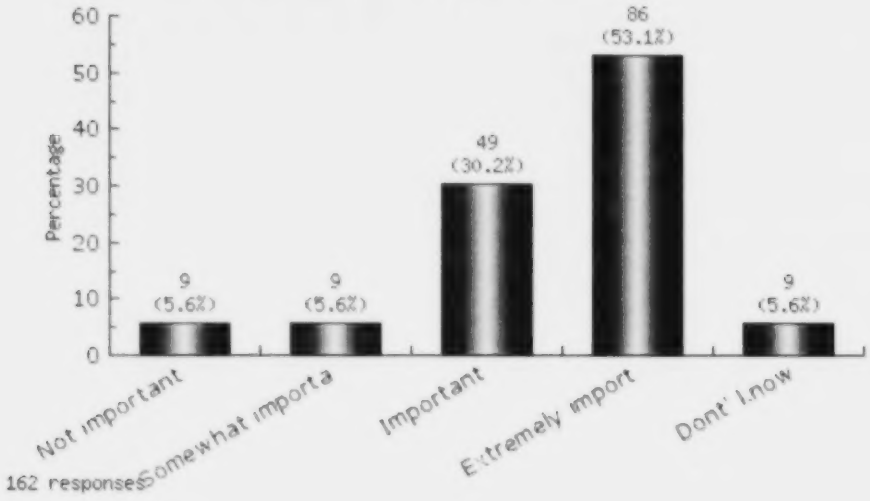
Foreign certifications are seen as *extremely important* and *important* to 33% of the respondents. 16% indicated they are *somewhat important*, and 12% said they are *not important*; another 6% *do not know* if they are important for their farm.

Importance of foreign certifications:



The *Canadian Standards and Regulations* are seen as *extremely important* by 53% of the respondents and as *important* by 30%; another 6% indicate they are *somewhat important, not important* or *do not know.*

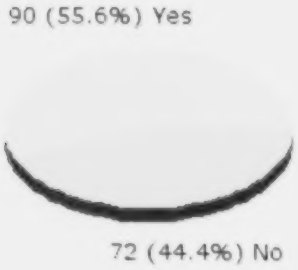
Importance of Canadian Standards & Regulations:



When asked whether they have certification, or plan to have certification in place on their farms, 93% of the respondents surveyed *have organic certification in place* on their farms; 56% have *environmental farm plans;* 25% *have on-farm food safety certification;* 63% have *foreign certifications;* and 53% have *CDN Standards & Regulations* in place on their farms.

Producers that have, or plan to have, organic certification in place:

Producers that have, or plan to have, environmental farm plans in place:

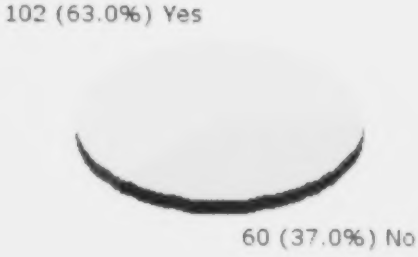


162 responses

Producers that have, or plan to have, on-farm food safety certification in place:

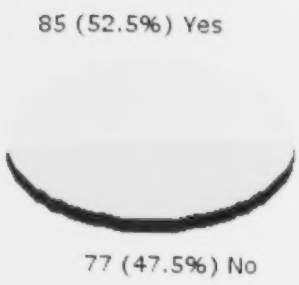
162 responses

Producers that have, or plan to have, foreign certifications in place:



162 responses

Producers that have, or plan to have, Canadian Standards & Regulations in place:



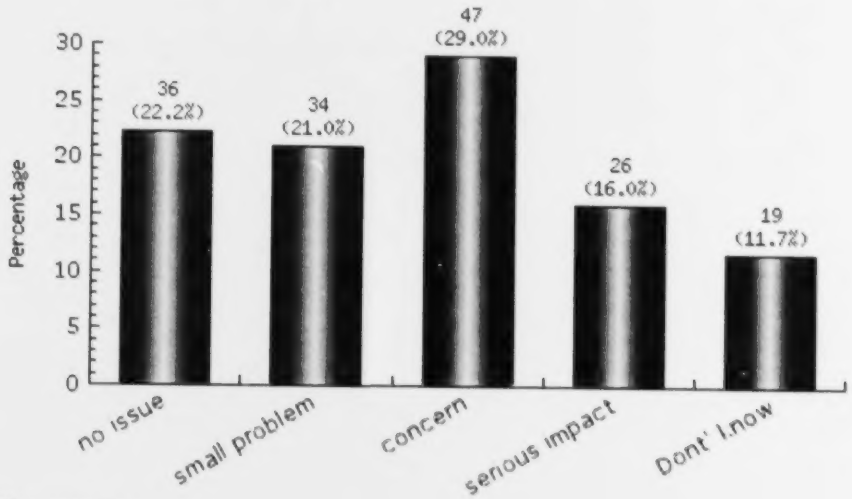
162 responses

Education Costs

Tuition

Producers were asked to think about the costs of pursuing education and how the various requirements would impact them. They were asked to *indicate the impact tuition would have.* 16% indicated *tuition* costs would have a serious impact; less than 30% of producers stated it would cause a *concern;* 21% indicated it would be a *small problem;* and 22% stated there would be *no impact.*

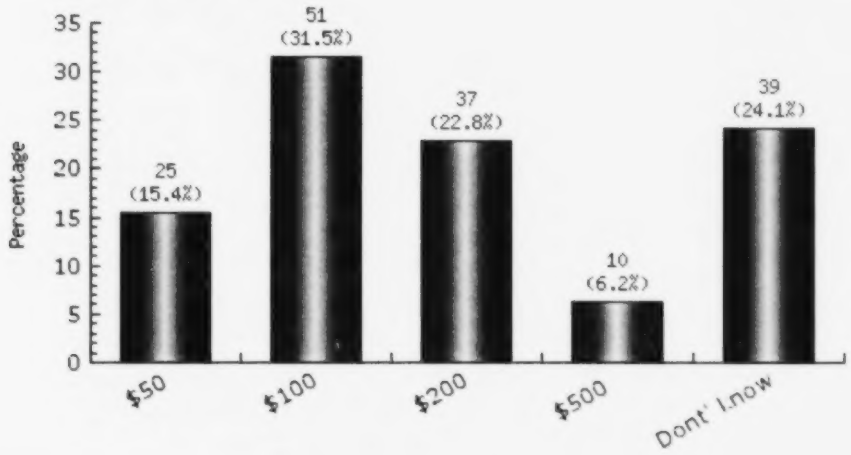
Impact of tuition [per course]:



162 responses

Producers were also asked *what they would be willing to pay for tuition.* 32% indicated *$100.00* per course; 23% indicated *$200.00* per course; 15% indicated *$50.00* per course; 6% indicated *$500.00* per course and 24 % *do not know* what they would pay for tuition.

What producers would be willing to pay for tuition [per course]:

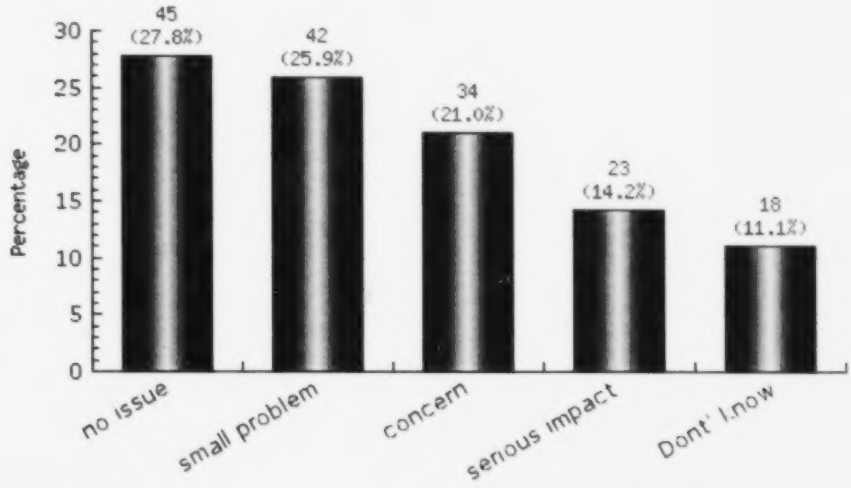


162 responses

Accommodations

When asked about *accommodations*, 28% of the respondents indicated that this *is not an issue*; 26% felt it would be *a small problem*; 21% indicated it *is a concern*; 14% felt it would have *a serious impact* and 11% said they *do not know*.

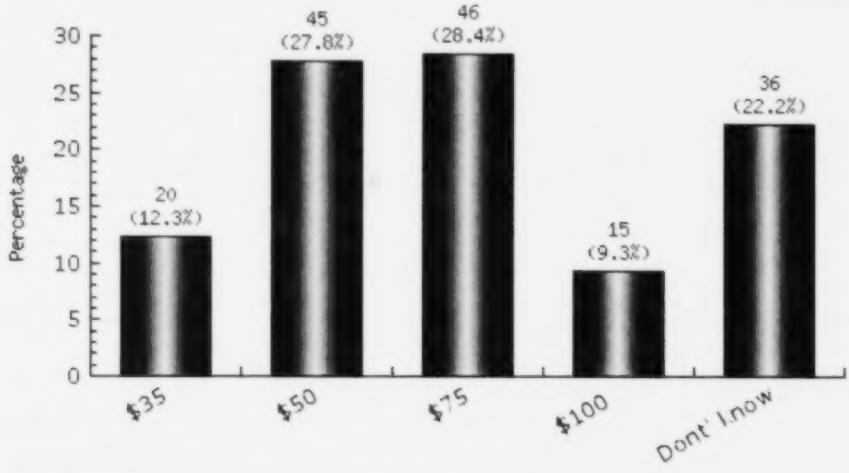
Accommodations as an issue for producers:



162 responses

In terms of costs for *accommodations*, 28% feel that they would be willing to pay *$75.00* per night; 28% also think *$50.00* a night is what they would be willing to pay; 9% would pay *$100.00* per night and 22% *do not know* what they would pay.

Cost of accommodations [per night] producers would be willing to pay:

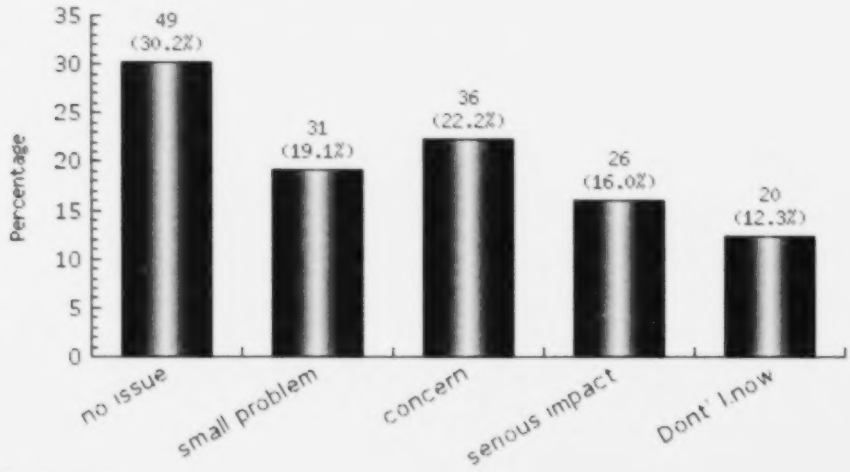


162 responses

Loss of Farm Labour

The issue of loss *of farm labour* was presented to potential program participants. They were asked to *rate the impact that the loss of farm labour would have on their farm for one day and for one week.* The results indicated that going off the farm for one day is *no issue* for 30% of them; *a concern* to 22%; *no problem* for 19% of them and *a serious impact* for 16%. Another 12% said they *do not know* what impact losing labour for a day would have on them.

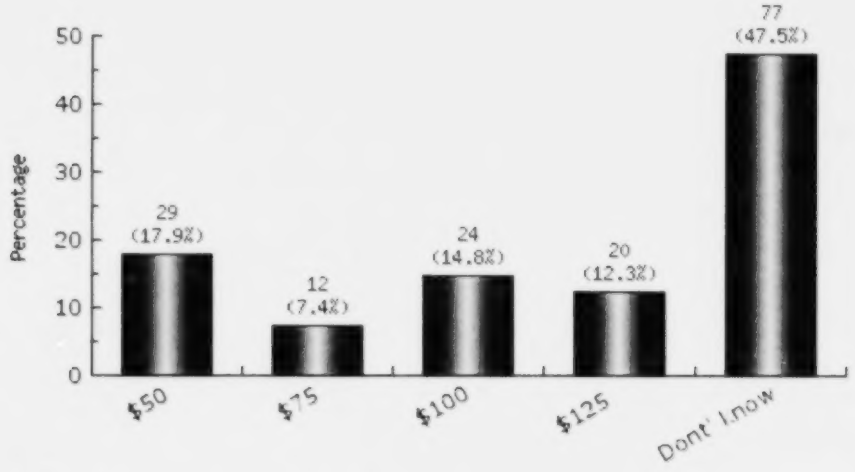
Loss of Farm Labour as an issue for producers [day]



162 responses

Producers were then asked to indicate what *they would be willing to pay for farm labour for a day*. This appears to be a question many have never considered in the past as 48% of the respondents said they *do not know* what they would pay. 18% thought they would pay *$50.00* per day; 15% indicated they would pay *$100.00* per day; 12% were willing to go as high as *$125.00* per day; and 7% would pay *$75.00* a day.

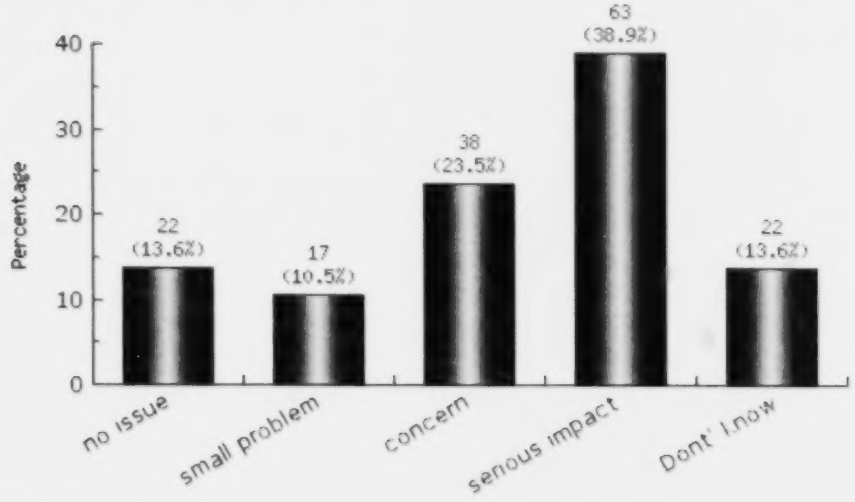
Loss of Farm Labour as a cost for producers [day]:



162 responses

In order to determine the tolerance for a farmer to be away for a week-long course, the question was asked, *what kind of impact would the loss of farm labour for a week have on your farm?* 39% indicated it would have *a serious impact*; 24% indicated it *would be a concern*; and for 14% it was *no issue* or they said they *do not know*. Another 11% felt that loss of labour for a week would be a *small problem*.

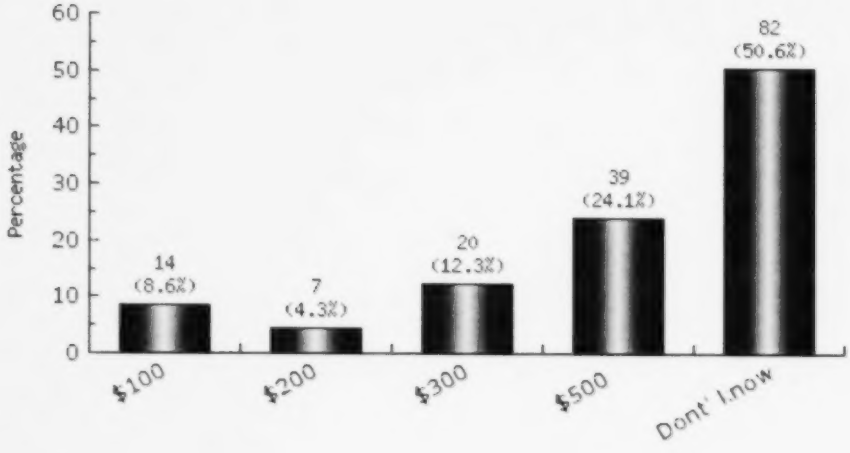
Loss of Farm Labour as an issue for producers [week]:



162 responses

Producers were also asked to indicate what *they would be willing to pay for farm labour for a week*. This also appears to be a question many have never considered in the past as 51% of the respondents said they *do not know* what they would pay. 24% thought they would pay *$500.00* per week; 12% indicated they would pay *$300.00* per day; 9% would pay *$100.00* per day; and 4% would pay *$200.00* a day.

Loss of Farm Labour as a cost for producers [week]

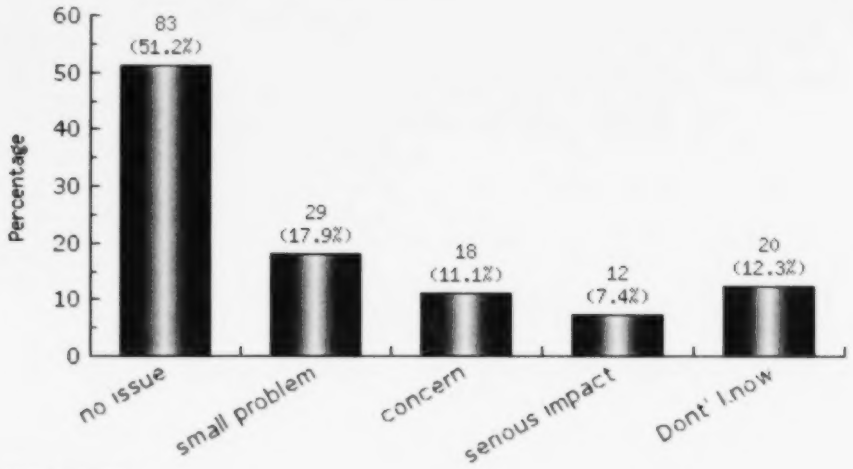


162 responses

Training Resources

Many programs are offered online or require the use of a computer, yet this is a tool that not every farm has. When asked *what impact would requiring a computer have on them*, 51% indicated it is *no issue*; 18% said it would be *a small problem;* 11% indicated *a concern*; 7% said this would cause a *serious impact;* and 12% said they *do not know* (see graph, p. 46).

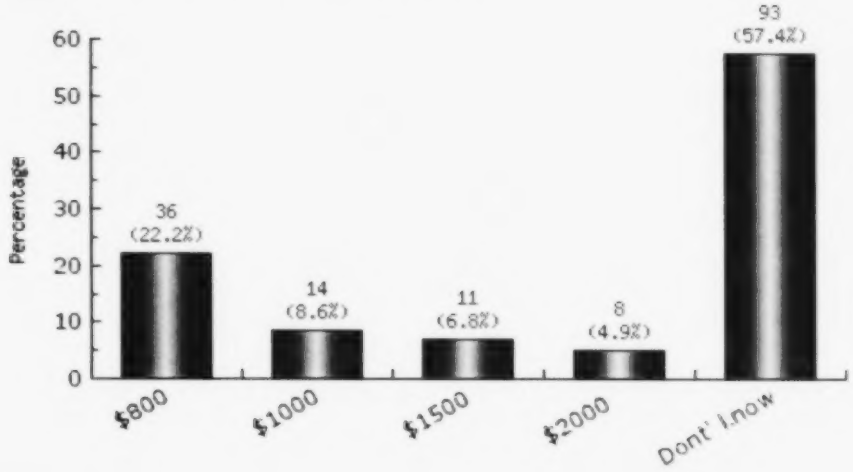
Computer Resources as an issue for producers:



162 responses

57% of respondents also said they *do not know how much they would be willing to pay* for a computer; 22% would be *willing to pay $800.00*; 9% *would pay $1,000.00*; 7% *would pay $1500.00*; and 5% were *prepared to pay $2000.00* for a computer.

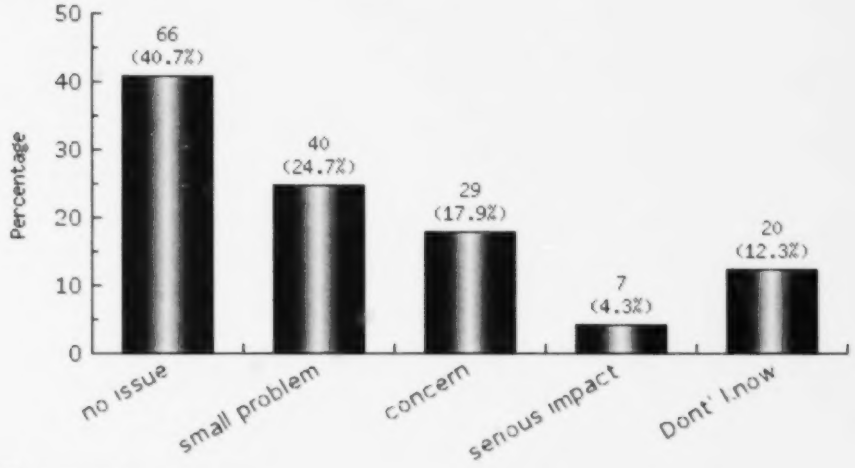
Computer Resources as a cost for producers:



162 responses

Producers were asked to *consider books required for training and what type of impact this would have* on them. 41% feel that it is *not an issue*; 25% state it *may be a small problem*; 18% indicate *it is a concern*; 4% think it *would have a serious impact* and 12% *do not know what kind of impact book costs would have* on them.

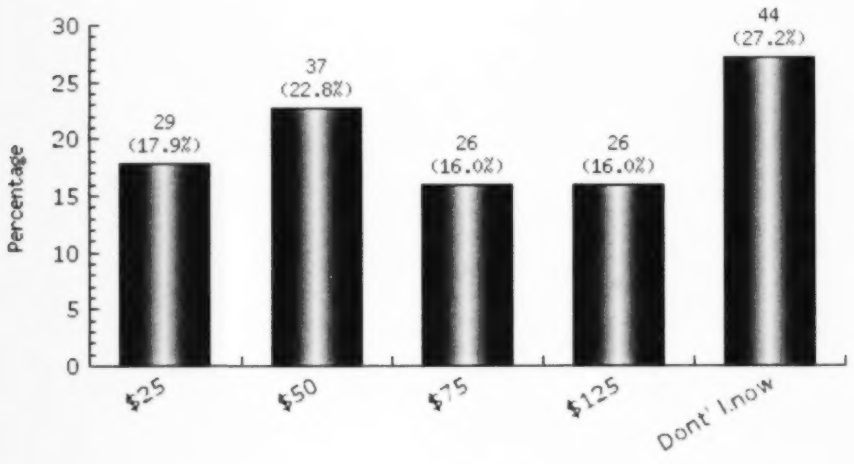
Purchasing books as an issue for producers [per course]:



162 responses

When asked *what they would be willing to pay*, 27% of producers said they *do not know*; 23% felt that they *would pay $50.00 per course* on books; 18% thought they *would pay $25.00 per course* for books; 16% *would pay $75.00 per course for books*, and 16% *would pay $125.00 per course for books* (see graph p.48).

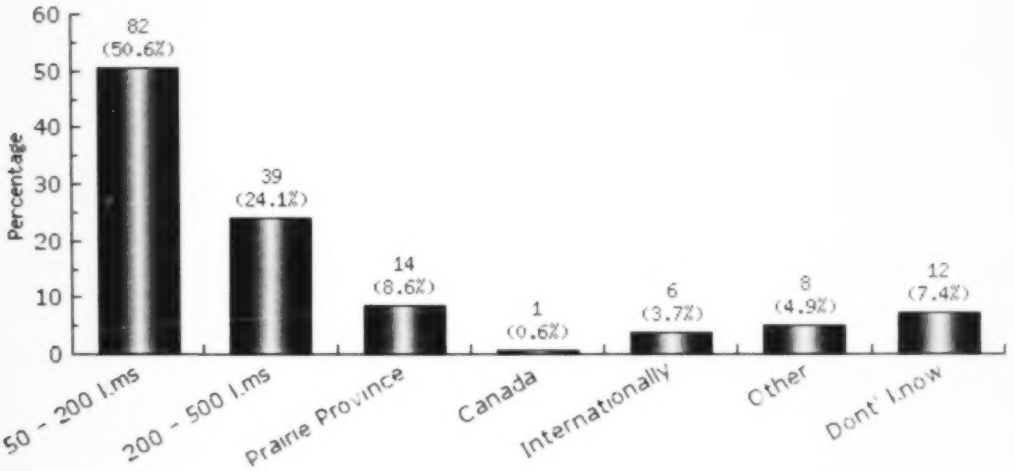
Purchasing books as a cost for producers [per course]:



162 responses

Producers were asked how *far they would travel for training*. 51% are prepared to travel *50 to 200 kms* for training; 24% *200 to 500 kms*; 9% would travel *within the Prairie provinces*; 1% would *travel anywhere in Canada;* 4% would *travel internationally* to seek training; 7% *do not know* how far they would go, and 5% stated they *would not travel* anywhere for training or it would be dependant upon the benefit gained.

Travelling for training as an issue for producers [per course]:



162 responses

Producers were asked *if a portion or all of their training costs were covered* would this change answers previously given? 54% say, *yes* it would change, and 46% indicate *no, responses would stay the same.*

Producers that feel covering costs would resolve the issue of traveling for training:

71 responses

Producers were asked whether or not *they have completed a learning plan* with a regional college career counselor? 94% indicate they *have not;* 6% *have done so.*

Producers that have completed a learning plan with a Regional College Career Counselor:

71 responses

Out of 70 respondents, 9% *have accessed funding* for training under the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS); 91% *have not accessed the funding* that is available through CASS.

Producers that have accessed funding for training under CASS:

71 responses

Only 6% of the respondents have *completed a Farm Business Assessment* through *the* Canadian Farm Business Advisory Service; 94% *have not yet done so.*

Producers that have completed a Farm Business Assessment through CFBAS:

70 responses

Customers and Sales

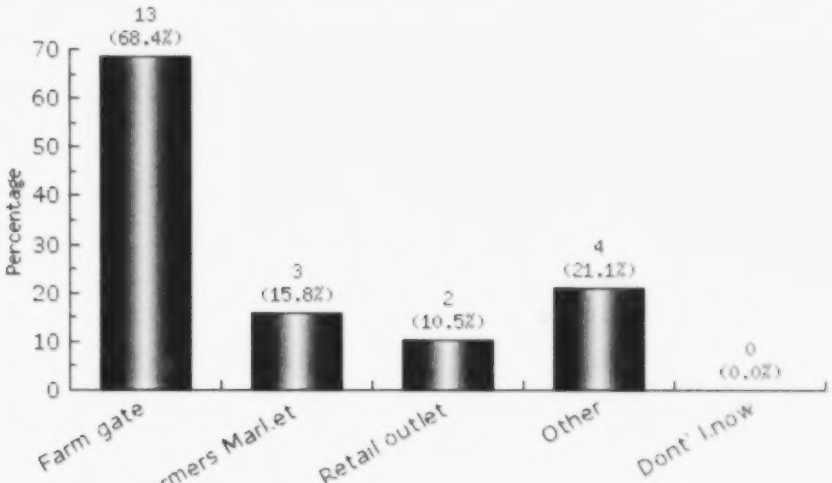
73% indicated they *do not currently market direct to consumers;* 27% *do market direct to consumers.*

Producers that currently market direct to consumers:

70 responses

Of those 27% who do market direct, 68% are doing so from the *farm gate*, 16% are using the *farmers market*, 11% do so through a *retail outlet*.

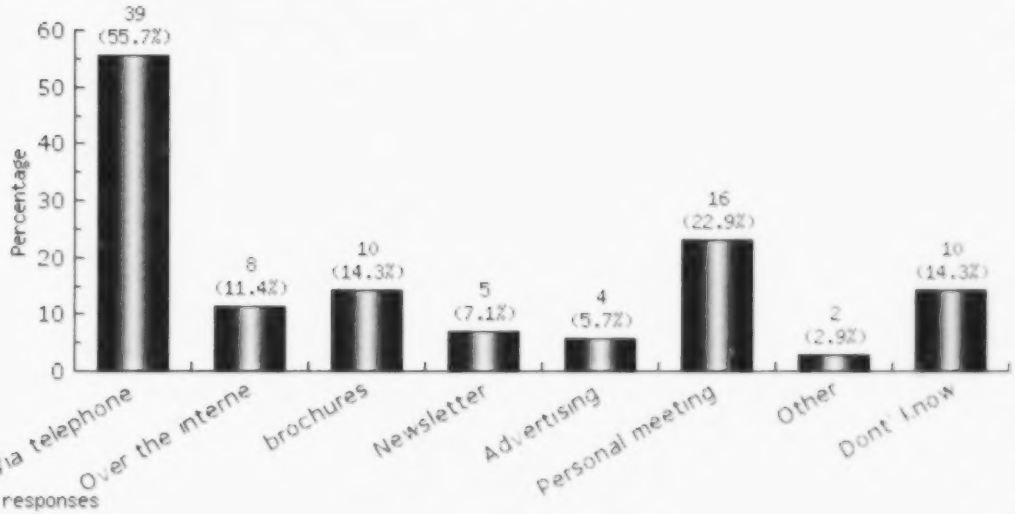
How producers market directly to consumers:



19 responses

Producers were asked how they prefer *to communicate with their customer and others*. 56% overwhelmingly choose the *telephone* as their #1 method of communication, 23% preferred to have *a personal meeting*, and 14% said they *do not know* or made use of *brochures*. *Internet communications* comes in at 12%, while *brochures*, *newsletters*, *advertising* and *other methods* make up the rest of their selections.

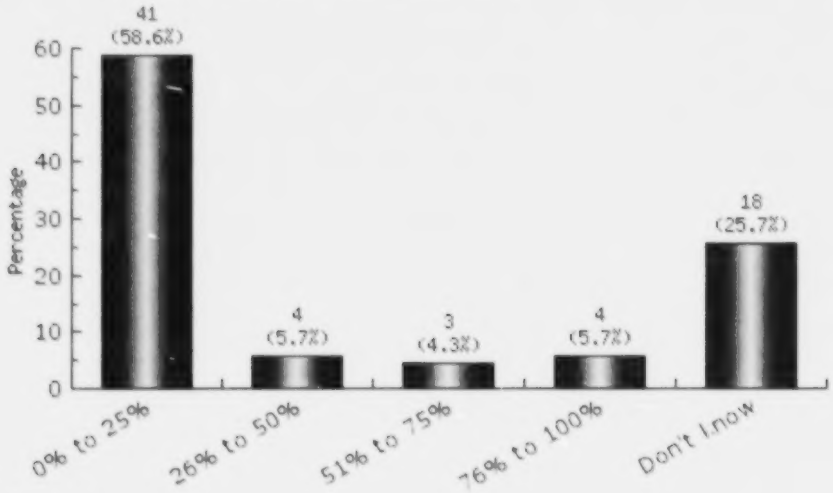
How producers communicate with their customers and others:



70 responses

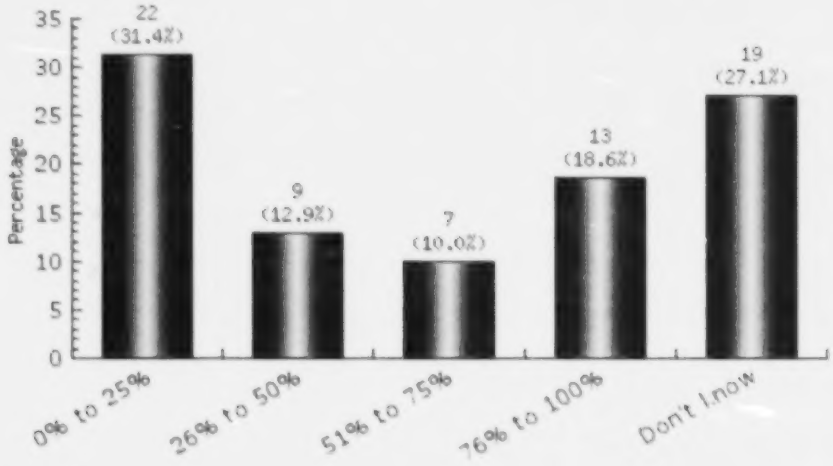
Producers overwhelmingly indicated that their highest area of training need was in the area of Marketing. In order to better understand these needs it is important to know how producers are currently marketing their products. The following three graphs show the distribution of their products sold by market area.

I. Percentage of products sold in a Local Market:



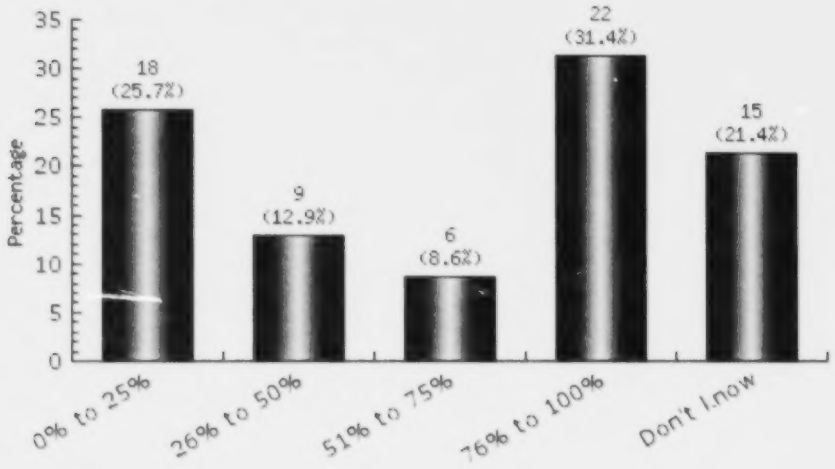
70 responses

II. Percentage of products sold in a Saskatchewan Market:



70 responses

III. Percentage of Products sold in an Export Market:

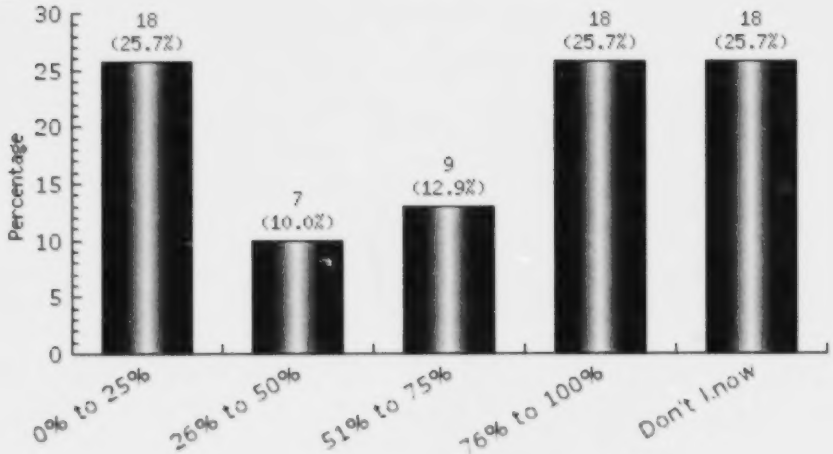


70 responses

A comparison of Saskatchewan organic marketing is not the main consideration of this study but the results do reflect some interesting data. It appears that a larger portion of a producer's product 31% is *sold in an export market.* A further question for a marketing study would be what percentage of it was processed in each of these markets and to what level. 39% of producers are marketing at least 25% of their products in all three market areas, *Local, Provincial* and *Export*; this could suggest a more sustainable marketing blend, one that could potentially offset one another in bad times. Surprisingly on average, 25% of organic producers claim *they do not know* which market their product is being sold into. This may indicate that due to the nature of the sale they are uncertain where their product is destined. This number may also represent that portion of the group that is not prepared to share their marketing information. This explanation may also apply to the next graph where 26% of producers did not know if they had *made their own sales* (see graph p. 54).

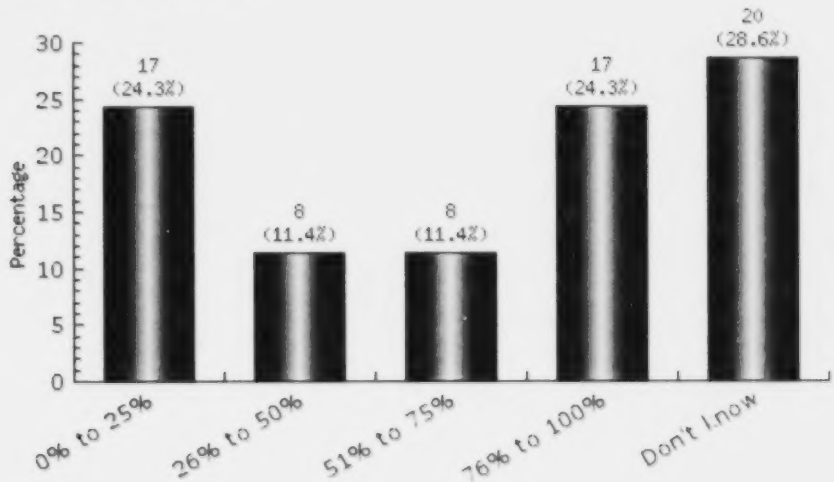
Producers were asked what *percentage of their sales was made on their own, through a broker, and through an organic elevator.*

I. Sales made on their own:



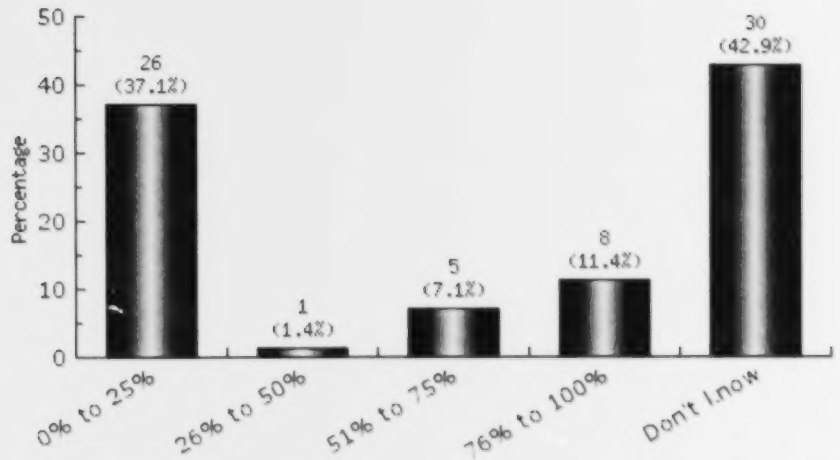
70 responses

II. Sales through a broker:



70 responses

III. Sales through an Organic Elevator:

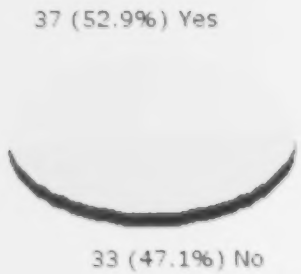


70 responses

Prairie Ursuline Centre

When asked, *are you familiar with the Prairie Ursuline Centre in Bruno, Saskatchewan?* 53% of the respondents said they *are familiar* with the centre, while 47% said they *are not familiar* with it.

Producers familiar with the Prairie Ursuline Centre:



70 responses

Those who were familiar with the Centre were asked to rate the facility and state whether it measured up to their standards. The following table (see table p. 56) shows that the facility rates about average, meets most expectations, and rates higher than average on aspects such as meals, meeting rooms, cleanliness and accommodations. A complete review of the Prairie Ursuline Centre is contained in the Feasibility portion of this study (see p.77).

Producers' ratings of the Prairie Ursuline Centre:

Service	*Does not apply*	*Does not meet expectations*	*Meets expectations*	*Exceeds expectations*	*Don't know*
Accommodations	27%	5%	35%	11%	22%
Meeting Rooms	14%	3%	60%	5%	19%
Meals	14%	14%	38%	16%	19%
Washrooms	14%	5%	51%	11%	19%
Location	16%	5%	57%	3%	19%
Management/Staff	14%	3%	51%	11%	22%
Environment	16%	5%	54%	5%	19%
Cleanliness	14%	3%	43%	22%	19%
Total	16%	5%	49%	9%	20%

Focus Groups and Other Producer Consultations

A total of four focus groups were held across Saskatchewan in February and March and numerous consultations took place with organic producers including members of the Board of Directors of the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate. The following points capture common thoughts expressed in these consultations as producers and others reflected upon *Successes of the Organic Sector* as well as *Needs of the Organic Sector*. They are listed in no particular order.

Successes of the Organic Sector

- Positive impact Organic farming is having on the environment, soil quality and water quality.
- Positive impact that Organic Farming is having on the nutritional value of food and food products.
- Experienced Organic pioneers and their willingness to share knowledge with new entrants.
- Prevention of entrance of GMO wheat into Canada.
- Field Days like those held at Scott and on individual organic producer farms as well as workshops like the Organic Updates and conferences such as Organic Connections.
- Processing and marketing successes of those in the sector as they move up the value chain.
- Identity preserved systems that are in place are working to our advantage.

- Exports markets developed with assistance in part from the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership.
- Organic farming has allowed a generation of farmers and their families to stay in Rural Saskatchewan an option that was not viable in a conventional farming system.
- Having the Prairie Office of the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.
- The Saskatchewan Organic Directorate is brining the Organic Sector together in the province.

Needs of the Organic Sector

- Consumer education and awareness activities to promote the healthy aspects of buying and eating organic foods and food products.
- Financial support for transition to organic farming.
- Need to develop a common vision for the Organic Sector in Saskatchewan.
- Research and development in all areas of Organic Production.
- Training and resources to support those in or those just entering organic production.
- National standards and regulation.
- Ability to keep and use our own seed.
- Need a formalized mentorship program.
- Affordable certification.
- More processing, packaging and marketing capabilities.
- Organic training for SAF staff and others who can in turn aid producers.
- Socially and politically acceptable to politicians.
- Further development of natural herbicides and fertilizers.
- Value chains between producer, processor and consumer or direct links between producer and consumer whenever possible.

- Expansion of the Organic Livestock sector in the province.
- Graduates in Organic agriculture versus chemical agriculture.
- Factual research that documents health benefits of organic products.
- A moratorium on release of GMO's
- Two way communication and consensus on issues that affect the sector.

II. Additional Consultations

Certification requirements

Organic Producers keep rigorous records and must do onerous amounts of paperwork in order to secure the proper certifications. The process is led by the certifying body that has been chosen by the producer. Those producers who are in transition from a conventional system to an organic production system consume a great deal of the certifier's time, as there is much to learn, and many find the paperwork overwhelming. The paperwork alone can be so burdensome that it has deterred producers from continuing with organic certification altogether. The actual process is costly to the certifier as well, since there are few opportunities to recapture education costs when staff time is consumed by new producers.

During a meeting with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) staff responsible for the Canadian Agriculture Skills Service (CASS) the issue of having the certification process covered under the federal/provincial program was discussed. The result is that a query is being directed to the Federal body to determine whether the certification process can be covered by that program. The producer would still be required to qualify under the program.

First Nations Needs

A meeting was held with Keith LePoudre, General Manager of the First Nations Agricultural Council of Saskatchewan Inc (FNACS). FNACS is responsible for four areas within the First Nations, relating to Agriculture: Policy Advocacy, Environment and Land Management, Renewal Planning, and Training and Youth. The mission of the Council is "to develop a strong, viable and sustainable agriculture sector, both on and off the reserve, for the status Indians in the province of Saskatchewan."

There appeared to be a very strong desire by the FNACS to ensure that all agriculture ventures undertaken by bands reflected the traditional values of the land. Natural and organic practices are the basis of these values. There was a strong interest developing training programs and resources from which their youth and members might learn. Since bands are conducting assessments on reservation land, completing a land inventory, building soil maps, doing wildlife assessments, assessing all environmental

risks, and conducting a full environmental farm plan, this data should aid them in moving to a certified organic stage when they are ready to do so.

Wild Rice Producers

Wild Rice sales have reached 19 million pounds of rice annually, and wild mushrooms are now gaining sales momentum out of the North as well. An interview was conducted with an Elder form the Potato Lake reserve who has been involved in the harvesting of wild rice for many years. The elder indicated that the knowledge is being passed on in traditional ways, as well as new modern ways. Traditional ways include sharing the knowledge in an oral fashion. The producers have meetings where they talk about the various stages of growth and have even made instructional videos on the harvesting process. This was done by the Missinnippi Broadcast Corporation and was to be used in the schools as an instructional video. The elder felt that the knowledge and information that is held by elder harvesters needs to be documented and captured on computer programs and in books for future generations. Current education is covered by annual workshops in the fall, generally in a one-day informational meeting.

Assessment by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food Staff

A short questionnaire (see Appendix F, p. 96) was offered to a small number of SAF staff who had opportunity to respond to producer enquiries. Thirteen responses were received and tabulated for the following:

Over the past 12 months, 85% of SAF staff had *an enquiry regarding Organic Agriculture Practices.* These enquiries, on average, made up approximately 13% of the overall enquiries they received. This percentage was much higher for those staff who worked more closely with the organic sector; for example, 65% for one staff person alone. 54% of the staff *was able to assist the producers with their enquiries*; 23% were unable, and another 23% were not asked for any specific assistance. Of that 54% who were able to assist the producer with their enquiry, only 23% felt that the *support materials and resources available to them were adequate*. 46% of the staff felt that *there were not adequate resources available for them to direct the producer.*

Of the 46% who felt that there were not adequate resources, when asked *what type of material or information could you have benefited from,* 54% of them felt that *courses and programs directed to producers would be beneficial;* 38% of them wanted to see *Handouts and Manuals*, as well as *field trial data specific to soil zones.* A *List of Key Organic Resource people* was rated by 31% of those surveyed as being beneficial. Another 23% felt that *access to internet sites* would be of benefit.

54% of SAF staff rated *Organic agriculture producer education needs* as *"moderate,"* with 23% rating it *"high"* need. Comments included mention that new organic producers' needs were higher than those of a practicing organic producer.

When asked *What areas do you feel producers most require educational or developmental assistance with?*, 77% of SAF staff felt that *marketing of raw and processed products* was the greatest area of need. Another 62% indicated *meeting the certification and regulatory requirements* as a high need; 40% saw *keeping abreast of*

national and local sector issues and changes as the third highest need; 31% felt that *crop & livestock production* assistance was required, and last, 20% indicated that *Farm Management Skills* were an area of educational and developmental need.

SAF staff felt that *producers would most likely want to receive information* through *conferences and workshops*, 69%; through *Field trials/demos and fellow organic producers*, 62%; through *local community or regional colleges*,40%; *online at home*, 20%; and 8% by *correspondence*.

When asked *How would you rate your own Organic Agriculture education needs?*, 77% of the staff indicated that they had a '*moderate*' level of educational need, while another 15% indicated a '*minimal*' level of personal educational need.

When asked *How would you prefer to gather the information, training or skill that you require to assist organic producers?*, 54% of SAF staff surveyed indicated that *Field trials, demos and organic producers* as well as *conferences and workshops are* their first methods of choice to gather the information they required. *Learning on line at home or at the office* was selected by 23% as the preferred method of learning; 15% indicated *local community or regional college* as their preference, with 8% choosing *correspondence*.

Producer Needs as Assessed by Certifiers

Certifying bodies were given an opportunity to participate in the study. It should be noted that there was some reluctance by a few certifiers to participate in the study. Those who did participate fully saw the need to classify producers in two separate ways: by new (or beginning) organic producer and by experienced, certified organic producer.

The needs of these two groups vary significantly until the new producer has reached a point of complete certification, over period of about 3 to 4 years. In the beginning, the needs are very high for the new producer, who experiences for the first time the need to meet stringent standards. In addition to learning and understanding Agroecology and organic practices, the new organic producer must learn how to manage the paper flow and detail the audit trail. A step-by-step process and instruction manual would be extremely beneficial to aid producers as they move through what can be an overwhelming process.

At least two certifiers felt that a mentoring program for new producers would be extremely valuable. A mentorship program would formally link a new producer to a more experienced senior organic producer who could answer questions and provide ongoing support when needed.

Certifiers are currently providing educational support, through *Chapter* meetings or annual *Update* sessions, through newsletters, and during the annual on-farm audit. One certifier indicated that he provides a great deal of support over the phone and has professional agrologists on staff to deal with producers' questions. Most certifiers felt that they would like to do more, but were limited by resources.

It was suggested that a Help Line be established, in addition to other educational resources such as fact sheets and manuals. It was pointed out that producers need to know how to access these resources, once they are developed.

Not all certifiers were convinced of the need for a prairie Organic Learning Centre, but felt that, at minimum, something with a Saskatchewan focus would be helpful.

The issue of online learning was also brought up, as it was felt that computers are an excellent method to learn and gather information; however, the rural location of most organic producers, coupled with the fact that many are not computer literate, may present a roadblock to the development of this idea.

III. Literature Review

A literature review of relevant studies, resource materials, and other data pertinent to producer education, reveals some interesting and provocative programs around the world. A mass of information is accessible through web-based searches. Materials in most cases are based on the home site of those who produced it; for example, studies and research done by a university were documented on their website, but not necessarily available on a state or provincial basis. There are a few examples of good research papers and data that are specifically relevant to Saskatchewan and Organic Production practices and requirements in 2006; these appear, for the most part, on the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada (OACC) website and are products of work done by the OACC Prairie office in Saskatoon.

A literature review was conducted as a part of the Best Organic Management Practices (BOMP) study done by the OACC, with over 200 references from between 1889 to 2006 found. These include federal agricultural bulletins, provincial fact sheets, text books, proceedings, and web publications, as well as scientific peer–reviewed journal articles. At the time of compiling this report, the details on the literature review had not yet been compiled and would not be made available until the fall of 2006.

The OACC website is an excellent resource and contains all of the relevant studies that have been completed by the centre over the years; it also lists numerous other venues from which to gather or collect information. It appears there are thousands of fact sheets, articles, studies, reports, books and info sheets that can be accessed through the website.

The Canadian Organic Growers (COG)[22] boasts a library of 1441 items that can be accessed through their website. The materials are loaned to COG members at no cost, with some limitations on length of time and number of items that can be borrowed at one time. The library contains books, articles, audio and video tapes, DVDs and periodicals. It is well laid out and easily pre-viewed on-line.

Acorn Organic (Atlantic Canadian Organic Network) has a small directory on their website[23] that features two databases; one consists of mainly organic products and information on how to access them, but the other is a very comprehensive listing of allowable organic inputs covering virtually every substance that is allowed for use.

ATTRA (Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas) is the United States' national sustainable agriculture information centre, funded by the USDA's Rural Business – Co-

[22] See Canadian Organic Growers. <www.cog.ca>.
[23] See Atlantic Canadian Organic Network. <www.acronorganic.org>.

operative Service. In 1999, they elected to produce a resource guide of educational materials that support the needs of organic and sustainable vegetable farmers. The title, *Resource Guide to Organic and Sustainable Vegetable Production,*[24] is a 62-page document that provides a summary of some of the best in-print and online sources around the world. The guide features various forms of literature such as books, bulletins, video resources, magazines, newsletters and web links, and it includes a description of the publication and how to access or purchase it. The ATTRA guide is completely comprehensive and appears to cover all areas of need that a producer might encounter.

The Alternative Farming Systems Information Center (AFSIC) is one of several topic-oriented Information Centers at the National Agricultural Library (NAL). The Library, located in Beltsville, Maryland, is the foremost agricultural library in the world. NAL is part of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Agricultural Research Service (ARS).

AFSIC focuses on alternative farming systems that strive to maintain agricultural productivity and profitability while protecting natural resources. Such systems include sustainable, low-input, regenerative, biodynamic, and organic farming and gardening. Support for the Center comes from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program and from a cooperative agreement with the University of Maryland, College Park.

One literature database that appears to be a very good model outside of North America is *The European Project and Literature Database for Organic Farming Research.*[25] This resource is an internet-based platform for organic farming and research in Germany and the rest of Europe and was established as part of the German internet portal for organic farming. This portal is financed by the German Ministry of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture within the federal scheme for organic agriculture. An important part of the research platform is a database, containing all relevant results on projects. This database was developed by the Danish Research Centre for Organic Agriculture (DARCOF) and will now become a European database with scientific information related to organic agriculture.

The need for a central database in Saskatchewan or on the Prairies was brought forward by producers during the survey, in focus groups, and during discussions in general. Some were concerned with the fact that many of the existing databases are online and require computer and technology resources that they do not currently have access to, such as high-speed internet.

---

[24] See Resource Guide to Organic & Sustainable Vegetable Production. ATTRA. <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/vegetable-guide.pdf>.

[25] Wilger, Helga. (2003). The European Project and Literature Database for Organic Farming Research. <http://www.darcof.dk/discuss/strat_uk.pdf>.

The OACC appears to be the leader, in terms of conducting research and producing papers in Canada but, as has been noted earlier, they are restricted due to lack of funding. In a meeting with Brenda Frick, Prairie Organic Coordinator, OACC, she pointed out that since the Prairie office was established only in 2003, there is just now some three-year research data that is becoming available for release to the general public. Attempts are being made to make research results available to farmers since, Frick noted, there is no point in conducting research if results are not made available to producers. No one is currently developing extension or instruction materials; there are really only executive summaries on research. Current methodologies being used to inform producers of new information include a weekly column in the Western Producer; talks at organic events, such as conferences; field days; and the release of documents tabling research outcomes. A number of fact sheets are under development and may be useful to producers and organic students, but they need a distribution format through which they can be made available.

IV. Educational Models & Opportunities

Credit Studies

Paul Henderson is a freelance writer and assistant editor of Vitality Magazine who recently wrote an article[26] describing how the University of Guelph came to create North America's first Bachelor of Science major in Organic Agriculture in 2005/2006. Mr. Henderson's article describes how faculty members at the University of Guelph had tried and failed to convince the University to institute a major field of study relating to Organics. The dean at the time was more sympathetic to the concerns of traditional faculty members, many of whom were at best cynical, and at worst hostile, toward the inclusion of anything relating to organic agriculture. The situation began to change in 2003 with the persistence of a well-known organic advocate, as well as with the blessing in 2003 of a new dean. A review of the University's website[27] reveals that their Organic program is currently quite robust with diploma, degree and graduate degree programs offered in both official languages. They also have a significant number of research projects, and their organic conference[28] has taken on national stature.

The University of Saskatchewan currently offers very little Organic curricula in their agriculture diploma, degree or graduate degree programs. As well, there appears to be minimal research being conducted at the University of Saskatchewan in relation to Organics. One reason cited by a university official for this is that their curriculum and research topics are based on active lobbying from the agriculture industry, and the

---

[26] See Canada marks an organic milestone. <http://www.newfarm.org/features/2006/0106/guelph/henderson.shtml>.

[27] See University of Guelph Organic Agriculture Website. <http://www.organicag.uoguelph.ca/>

[28] See 25th Guelph Organic Conference. <www.guelphorganicconf.ca/>.

Organics lobby lacks a single voice. While there may be some truth to this, there are many people in the Organic industry — and also some academics within the university itself — who would argue that the key agricultural decision-makers at the University of Saskatchewan are biased toward biotechnology and conventional farming. They would cite evidence that the university received funding from private corporations whose focus is on selling inputs associated with conventional farming or biotechnology. It may be that these organizations have a better lobby than the organic community does, at this point.

The absence of Organic diploma, degree or graduate degree programs at the University of Saskatchewan leaves open the potential for a competing institution to offer an Organic curriculum. The University of Guelph, for instance, might be inclined or convinced to offer prairie diploma, degree, and graduate degree students the opportunity to take online classes or complete part of their degree in Saskatchewan and the balance in Guelph. This avenue could take several different approaches, including online learning.

The cost of establishing a degree program at the University of Saskatchewan would be measured in hundreds of thousands of dollars for curriculum development. This cost would escalate if the physical infrastructure needed to be developed or enhanced. Another feasibility issue might be the availability of qualified professors.

We believe there is no question that the Organic industry, the province, and the University of Saskatchewan would benefit from the development of an Organic-oriented diploma, degree and graduate programs. Additional benefits will exist as students conduct valuable Organic research in a world-class agricultural education facility and scientific setting. Another key advantage would be the long-term benefit, to the average producer, of having a large number of highly educated organic agriculture professionals available to provide expertise and to act as advocates for the industry.

Need for Further Research

This study focused, for the most part, on surveying existing members of the industry in relation to their learning needs and preferred delivery mechanisms. One segment of the organic learning market that was not surveyed was current and future university students. The major difference between the University student group and those that were surveyed in this study is the commitment to becoming a full-time student. These students may or may not come from a family farm that is focused on organic farming. There does not appear to be any available data that would indicate what percentage of incoming agriculture students at the University of Saskatchewan would be interested in an Organic Agriculture major. Nor do we have data on how many students from the prairies are attending the University of Guelph to get a degree with an Organic major. A study that focuses on agriculture university students and their need or desire for an Organic major should be explored further. When Washington State University announced their new Major in Organic Agriculture Systems program, they noted a steady decline in enrolment in the traditional agriculture program, but they see resurgence for this college with the new Organic programming available this fall.

Certificate Programs

Certificate programs typically involve taking eight university-degree or diploma-level classes that have been adapted to a certificate program. They often feature four core classes and four electives and are offered during the normal university or college semester.

Nova Scotia Agricultural College

The Nova Scotia Agricultural College (NSAC), based in Truro, Nova Scotia, offers a Certificate of Specialization in Organic Agriculture.[29] Courses currently offered, on a distance learning basis, include:

- Transition to Organic Agriculture
- Composting and Compost Use
- Principles of Organic Horticulture
- Organic Field Crop Management
- Organic Livestock Production

Other institutions offering courses within the NSAC Certificate:

Course Name	***Institution***
Key Indicators of Sustainable Agriculture	University of British Columbia
Organic Crop Production on the Prairies	University of Manitoba
Organic Marketing	University of Guelph
Weed Ecology	University of Saskatchewan

(French translation of some courses is available at Laval University.)

Assiniboine College

An Organic Certificate is currently offered by Assiniboine College[30] in Western Manitoba. Thus far, they have developed four classes, which are offered for $105 each:

- Organic Crop Techniques
- Organic Livestock Techniques
- Organic Product Marketing
- Organic Value-added Processing

University of Manitoba

The University of Manitoba currently offers an optional credit/non-credit certificate entitled Organic Crop Production on the Prairies, which has seven modules that address optimum organic crop production. The course highlights organic crop

---

[29] See Nova Scotia Agricultural College.
<http://www.nsac.ns.ca/cde/courses/DE/Organic/default.asp>.

[30] Assiniboine Community College. Organic Agriculture.
<http://public.assiniboine.net/xDefault.aspx?tabid=60&mid=375&prgField=Description&prgID=%2067>.

production principles and practices in both wet and dry areas of the prairies, and within the different prairie soil zones. Modules offered include:

- Introduction to Organic Crop Production on the Prairies
- Adaptations to New Ways of Thinking
- Prairie Environment
- Transition to Organic
- Organic Crop Production Principles
- Organic Crop Production Practices
- Decision Case Studies

University of Saskatchewan - Certificates in Agriculture Program (CAP)

The University of Saskatchewan currently does not offer a certificate in organic agriculture; however, they have extensive experience in providing distance education agricultural certificate programs through their Extension Division.

The Extension Division of the University of Saskatchewan initiated the Certificates in Agriculture Program (CAP) to make the University of Saskatchewan's Diploma in Agriculture courses available to people with farm, job, or family responsibilities that prevent them from attending university. The advantage to this program is that it offers distance learning and the classes are generally of excellent quality. Some people prefer taking credit studies from a reputable organization, and this program would satisfy that criterion.

CAP was developed in the early 1990s, with a grant from Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Saskatchewan (CARDS) that provided $10,000 per class for the development of course curricula. Two streams were developed — the Crop Production Certificate and the Farm Business Management Certificate — which are both outlined below.

i. Crop Production Certificate

Compulsory Courses

- Introduction to Plant Science
- Cereal Crops
- Weed Control
- Basic Soil Science
- Soil Management and Fertility

Elective Courses

- Oilseed and Pulse Crops
- Seed Technology
- Forage Crops
- Soil Conservation and Land Quality
- Grain Marketing Strategies

ii. Farm Business Management Certificate

Compulsory Courses

- Microeconomic Principles and Applications
- Farm Accounting

- Agricultural Marketing Principles and Institutions
- Financial Analysis for Farm Business Management
- Budgeting for Farm Business Management

Elective Courses

- Money and Employment in the National Economy
- Advanced Farm Accounting
- Agricultural Policy
- Income Tax Management
- Farm Business Arrangements
- Grain Marketing Strategies
- Livestock Marketing Strategies
- Human Resource Management

A third CAP certificate is the Prairie Horticulture Certificate (PHC). Designed specifically for the Prairie Provinces, the difference with this certificate is that it is offered co-operatively by a consortium of four Western Canadian educational institutions:

- Assiniboine Community College (Brandon, Manitoba)
- Olds College (Olds, Alberta)
- University of Manitoba
- University of Saskatchewan

Each partner in the consortium develops and delivers courses for the program in its areas of expertise. All courses taken from participating institutions are treated as if they had been taken at the home institution.

With the PHC there are four streams of study:

- Fruit and Vegetable Production
- Greenhouse Crop Production
- Landscaping and Arboriculture
- Nursery Crop Production

All CAP classes are taken by correspondence, involve about eight to ten hours per week of study time, and run on a typical university semester. Participants are provided with learning materials and have regular assignment submissions and write a final exam. The instructor is available by telephone or e-mail. The cost per student, for each class, is between $300 and $500, depending on the credit weighting. Students can enrol with a minimum of a Grade Ten education, providing they have the written support of a Professional Agrologist.

It is unlikely that the University of Saskatchewan would initiate an Organic Farming Certificate without funding being provided either by the industry or by government. The cost would seem to be relatively modest, however. If one assumes that ten classes would be developed at an estimated cost of $15,000 per class, this would amount to $150,000. This cost could potentially be spread out over four years because students would typically only take one class at a time, so they could be developed at a minimal rate of two per year.

If immediate steps were taken to see this move forward, an Organic Farming Certificate could likely be ready for delivery in the fall of 2007. The CAP and PHC programs are very good models to use for the development of an Organic Certificate program.

Non-credit Studies

Seminars and Conferences

Seminars and conferences afford a relatively inexpensive way for members of the organic community to meet, exchange ideas and experiences, and bring in experts to impart their knowledge. There are several major organic conferences in Canada and the United States.

Organic Connections[31] is a Saskatchewan-based non-profit organization that offers organic conferences & workshops and is currently preparing for the Prairie Wide Organic Conference 2006, November 12-14, 2006, in Saskatoon. This conference offers an extraordinary opportunity for the sector to provide additional educational skills and knowledge development for its producers. Study participants overwhelmingly chose workshops and conferences as their preferred method of gaining new skills and knowledge. The conference held in 2006 is the second such conference to be held in Saskatchewan; the group hopes to build upon the success they had in 2004, when the conference was last held.

A good example of the delivery of successful workshop-based training is the *Organic University* offered by Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service (MOSE).[32] MOSE's mission is to help agriculture make the transition to a sustainable organic system of farming that is ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially just through information, education, research, and integrating the broader community into this effort.

MOSE is best known for organizing the largest organic farming conference in the US, the Upper Midwest Organic Farming Conference (UMOFC). From its humble beginning, with 90 attendees over sixteen years ago, the UMOFC now attracts over 1800 people to this event each year. The *Organic University*, which precedes the conference, consists of seven in-depth, full-day courses that provide detailed information critical to the successful production and marketing of organic crops and livestock.

The annual *Organic Growers School*[33] is a day of workshops, for beginning farmers to advanced commercial growers. Now in its 13th year, the *Organic Growers School*

---

[31] See Organic Connections. <www.organicconnections.ca>.

[32] See Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service. P.O. Box 339, Spring Valley WI 54767. <http://www.mosesorganic.org>.

[33] See Organic Growers School. 1623 Mount Hebron Road, Old Fort NC 28762. <http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/index.html>.

seeks to share practical, region-appropriate information at an affordable price. With nearly 1000 participants from 10 different states, this is the largest conference of its type in the region. The school is held at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, North Carolina, USA, and includes an interactive children's program for the offspring of adult students attending the one-day program.

Dedicated Organic Learning Centres

Research conducted on Learning centres proved that they are many different types and styles of centres. The Gaia Trust[34] is a Danish-based charitable association, founded in 1987, that supports the transition to a sustainable and more spiritual future society and talks about the need to focus on a number of concerns when developing a Learning Centre:

- Create local replicable models of a sustainable community that provide people with a sense of belonging.
- Shows people how to protect and restore nature.
- Honour indigenous people and keep them from becoming beggars on their own land.
- Protect rural life and create new urban models.
- Show how renewable energy and effective waste systems work.
- Create partnerships and give youth a new mandate.
- Provide integral lifestyles and offer experiential learning.
- Focus on food security and meaningful livelihood.
- Reflect the world's great cultural, spiritual, and artistic diversity.
- Encourage a child-friendly world.
- Support local solutions to planetary problems because we live on one Earth.

The approach of meeting education needs through a Learning Centre, within the parameters described above, is one that fits the general mandate and philosophy of Saskatchewan organic producers. Living and learning centres can be, and are, powerful catalysts for change. A Learning Centre is also seen as a venue for educating the general public (or consumers) through special events, workshops or training programs, and should be set up in such a manner that school children could also participate in learning activities and special programs developed just for them.

There are a number of examples and variations of such Centres in Europe, Australia, and across Canada, a few of them are examined here in further detail.

---

[34] Foreningen Gaia Trust, Storkevaenget 82840 Holte, Denmark , http://www.gaia.org/contact.asp

Crystal Waters

Crystal Waters[35] in Australia offer courses in permaculture design, environmental restoration, and community work. The UN Habitat Award-winning ecovillage features housing in rammed earth, pole structures, mud brick, domes, and straw bale. Demonstration sites exist for water harvesting, waste water use, rainwater collection, swales, dams, artificial wetlands, biolytic treatment, compost toilets, stand-alone and grid-connected solar power systems, heat pumps, cell grazing, land restoration, reforestation, orchard culture, and wildlife corridor and rainforest applications. Crystal Waters has an excellent range of eco-systems, and abundant and diverse wildlife, which live in harmony and close proximity with humans. The Eco Centre is an ideal place for a genuine immersion experience and is linked to credit-earning university programs.

Wiesengut Experimental Farm

Wiesengut Experimental Farm[36] is based near Hennef, Germany and centres on the development and use of ecologically and economically sustainable farming methods, with consideration for protection of natural resources, quality of agricultural products and ethically sound animal husbandry. The farm management uses the term "modified Organic Farming strategies" to describe their work.

Flows of nutrients and energy on the farm are being monitored and steadily optimized. The plan in the future is to make information on the research available through an internet link in what the researchers call a "transparent farm management system." The crop rotation consists of six main crops, plus catch crops, and has been developed considering nutrient cycling, straw production, humus regeneration and animal husbandry. Mainly biological methods are used to control diseases, pests and weeds. The farm is funded by the German Science Foundation (DFG) and by the European Union. This example has probably the most direct government involvement of all examples presented.

Everdale Organic Farm and Environmental Learning Centre

Located approximately one hour west of Toronto, Everdale[37] is an organic farm and environmental learning centre that is registered as a non-profit, educational organization. Its purpose is to teach sustainable living practices and to operate an organic farm. Everdale offers a variety of hands-on educational experiences:

- Farm Apprenticeships
- Weekend courses and workshops
- School programs (matched to provincial curriculum K-12)
- Educational tours for the public

---

[35] Crystal Waters College 50 Crystal Waters, Kilcoy Lane, Conondale, Queensland 4552 AUSTRALIA http://www.crystalwaterscollege.org.au/

[36] Experimental farm Wiesengut, Siegaue 16 , D-53773 Hennef, Germany, E-mail: wiesengut@uni-bonn.de

[37] See Everdale Organic Farm & Environmental Learning Centre. <www.everdale.org/>.

The Everdale classroom is a fifty-acre property. It encompasses a working organic farm, a model home, classroom, forests and meadows. It boasts demonstration models of operating, sustainable technologies. The teachers are specialists in the areas of straw bale construction, solar and wind systems, farming, and eco-landscaping.
Their staff includes a project manager, education coordinator and organic farm manager, and there are a number of volunteers as well.

Kootenay Permaculture Institute

The Kootenay Permaculture Institute[38] was formed in 1991 to develop a model for research and education in the field of sustainable living in British Columbia. The Institute is designing and implementing Permaculture principles and techniques on a ten-acre farm in the Slocan Valley. The farm is situated in Appledale, in the sunniest part of the Slocan Valley in the West Kootenays, on the west side of the Slocan River. The farm is on ten acres of land, five of which are used for the house, gardens, orchard, "forest garden," and agro-forestry systems. The other five acres are part marshland, with Percy Creek flowing through, and partially covered with a deciduous forest.

Falls Brook Centre

Falls Brook Centre[39] is located in Carleton County, New Brunswick (see Figure 3, p. 72) and has four main areas of focus: Organic Agriculture, Appropriate Technology uses, Community Development, and Forest Stewardship. The Centre is situated on an old farm just off of the Trans Canada Highway and the St. John's River and — with plenty of hard work — has been developed into an excellent centre of learning and study. The Centre has an outreach program that works with educators and youth from all across Carleton County and New Brunswick. The centre's website features numerous resources and programs, including a library of books, games, videos and teaching tools that can be accessed by both schools and individuals.

---

[38] See Kootenay Permaculture Institute. <http://www3.telus.net/permaculture/>.
[39] Falls Brook Centre, 125 South Knowlesville Rd, Knowlesville, NB, E7L 1B1. http://www.fallsbrookcentre.ca/english_home.htm

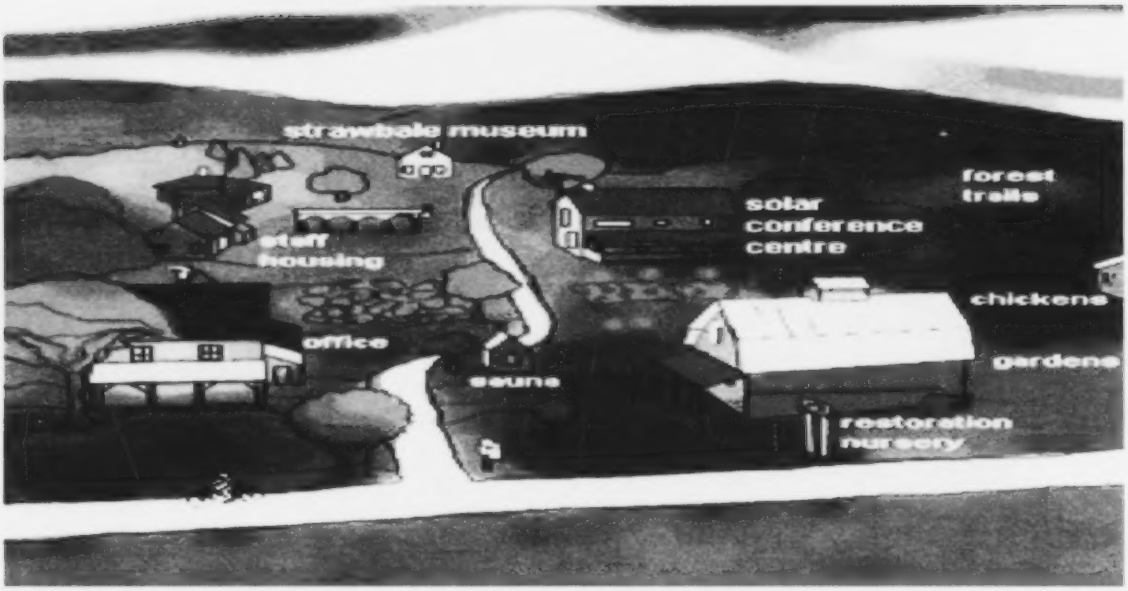


Figure 3 – The Falls Brook Centre, Carleton County, New Brunswick

The Organic Agriculture program was initiated in 1990 when the first garden was built. Since then, Falls Brook Centre has branched out to encompass 2.5 acres of certified organic vegetables, fruit orchards, mushrooms, herbs, flowers, greenhouses, seeds, and heritage gardens

Saskatchewan organic producers may find examples of centres that they wish to emulate but must first take a more definitive approach to determining what it is they want the Learning Centre to do for them. Organic stakeholders should develop a common vision, perhaps through a strategic plan that better defines what they want in a Learning Centre. The contents of this study should give them good food for thought and a head start with that process, but more work is needed by the sector itself prior to proceeding with a feasibility study and development plan for a Dedicated Learning Centre.

Apprenticeships and Mentoring Programs

At this point in time, there is no formalized mentorship program in Saskatchewan, but over the years the majority of knowledge gained has been through a mentorship type process. When producers were consulted and asked for their thoughts, those who had been in a mentoring position were pleased to carry out the role but felt that they needed support to continue to do so, given the demands placed on them by the increasing number of producers entering organic production systems. They listed financial and material resources as being desirable.

New producers entering organic production systems cited the need to have someone to ask their many questions, someone to calm them when the first flush of weeds would come, and someone to support them through the certification process in general.

These producers valued field demos and trial demonstrations by senior farmers and the research community. They would benefit from spending one to two hours per week or month with a mentor.

There are a number of apprentice/mentorship programs. The following are examples of existing Canadian Mentorship programs, as well as an exciting Australian program. Although these programs may not be the complete answer to the Saskatchewan situation, they do provide some good examples of how formalized mentorship programs can work.

Stewards of Irreplaceable Land

The sustainable farming apprenticeship program is administered by the non-profit organization, Stewards of Irreplaceable Land,[40] or SOIL. SOIL acts as a liaison between the farmer willing to take on apprentices and those wishing to work and learn on a farm that uses sustainable practices.

This project was established, in 1989, to address three goals. This program was initiated

- to encourage the growth of sustainable agriculture;
- to expose potential apprentices to a rural lifestyle. For those with little or no farming experience, this can offer a valuable hands-on learning environment in which to acquire the basic skills, or even provide the basis, for an agricultural career; and
- to assist the farmer with the necessary support required to successfully run an organic operation. The farmers and farm community can also benefit greatly from the influx of new ideas, energy and enthusiasm of apprentices.

Organic Farm Apprenticeship Program

The New Brunswick Organic Farm Apprenticeship Program[41] offers a 6-month (flexible) field placement on an organic farm, monthly field days at participating farms with guest speakers, workshops and design and implementation of on-farm research projects. Each farm's internship program differs with respect to such considerations as living arrangements, stipends, work hours and training methods. Learning by doing is a great way for organic farming to grow. Falls Brook Centre works with organic farmers, provincial organic specialists, research advisors, and community college faculty to develop this hands-on training and research project in organic agriculture.

---

[40] See Stewards of Irreplaceable Lands. P.O. Box 807, Sooke BC V0S 1N0. Phone/Fax: (250) 642-3671. E-mail: info@soilapprenticeships.org. <http://www.soilapprenticeships.org/>.

[41] See Falls Brook Centre. 125 South Knowlesville Road, Knowlesville NB E7L 1B1. <http://www.fallsbrookcentre.ca/agriculture/apprenticeships.htm>.

The difficulty with both of the programs above is that there is an assumption a producer can and will leave their farm for an extended period of time to undertake this training. As noted in the survey results, this is not necessarily desirable for most producers.

Business Support for Transition to Organics

A better example for a transitional training and mentoring program comes from "down under," in Australia. With support from the Australian government, a "Business Support for Transition to Organics"[42] program began this year. The program aids farmers who are transiting from conventional production to organics by offering a 10-month informational support program that is comprised of monthly group meetings and one-on-one sessions that are targeted at specific areas of need for each participating producer.

The program is offered by experienced Organic Professionals and involves a maximum of 15 producers in each regional group. Participants are provided with workbooks and a series of tools to assist with business skill development that will enable producers to better manage and grow their operations. They have access to both offline and online support and to contacts willing to assist with the marketing of their product. The cost of this program — about $80.00 AUS per month — does not reflect the true cost of program development and delivery, as it has been so heavily subsidized by the government.

Other Educational Venues

Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology (SIAST)

SIAST does not currently offer organic programs; however, they do tend to be more market responsive to the needs of the general public, and if they felt that they could attract students, they would likely be willing to create an Organic Certificate program. The Institute does, however, offer many practical courses in areas of skill development that may assist organic producers, such as Business Administration and trade-related programs. A Grain Marketing program has been offered by SIAST and Regional Colleges in a few Saskatchewan communities in the past. It is possible that this format may work well for a modified Organic Marketing course.

Canadian International Grains Institute (CIGI)

The Canadian International Grains Institute (CIGI) is located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Incorporated in 1972 as a non-profit market development organization, the Canadian CIGI is dedicated to promoting Canada's field crop industries in international and domestic markets through educational programming and technical activities. Representatives from grain, oilseed, pulse and special crops industries worldwide are invited to participate in CIGI programs and seminars. Since its inception, more than 22,000 individuals from 108 countries have attended CIGI programs.

[42] www.tmorganics.com/transitionprogram, June 2006

Core funding for CIGI operations is provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) and the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB). Additional funds and support are also provided by other members of the agriculture industry.

Past programs include Farm Leaders Course (industry-wide), Combine to Customer (CWB program for young producers), Grain Marketing program (Grain Industry staff), and specialized customer programs such as Malting Technical, Durum Processing, Pasta Makers, Baking Tests etc.

To date, CIGI has not offered or worked with the Organic Sector, but is interested in doing so. CIGI would be required to access outside Organic professional resources, or it would need to train its technical staff in the organic discipline. The development of an organic sector program would require a partner, or representatives from within the sector, to work with CIGI in order to proceed with a program. An Organic Leaders program might be 3-4 days in length and could initially be more about an awareness of the resources that exist and a discussion about how to apply these resources to their needs and industry. A course such as this would cost approximately $1,000.00, plus GST, per person and would require about 20 participants to make it viable. All of CIGI's technology resources — such as the flour mill, bakery, lab, pulse processing, pasta and noodle facilities — could be utilized during this course at no additional cost. Other programs could be centered on baking with organic products or testing organic flours in the various technical areas of the Institute.

VI. Program & Curriculum Development

Based on the Training Needs as indicated in this survey, the largest majority of producers require marketing training for all levels of marketing including, sales through farmers markets, sales at the farm gate, wholesale and export sales skills. This need is followed by that of production skills and knowledge with a very high need, 81 % in the area of Organic Crop Production alone. Business planning and management skills are also curriculum areas that need a special focus. Another high need is administrative affairs associated with organic certification and record keeping. Excellent examples of existing curriculum for some of these needs are included in this report. Educational institutions and the sector need to work together to further develop curriculum and programs.

Program development should happen on a number of levels. It is the belief of Sage Management that a blended approach would be beneficial in terms of delivery and meeting the needs of the Organic Sector. This would include a combination of programs that are delivered as University Certificate, Diploma or Degree programs, a mentorship program and opportunities to gain knowledge and increased skill level through conferences, workshops and other methods.

University Certificate and Degree Programs

Producers surveyed indicated a preference for non-credit (54%) studies, with 32% indicating some form of university accreditation, such as a Certificate, Diploma or Degree as desirable. The development of certificate, diploma and degree programs

should be given strong consideration, as these meet the needs of others in the sector besides producers. There is a strong need to provide this type of accreditation to new entrants into the College of Agriculture, thus beginning to fill the void of organic professionals within the industry. Professional support people — such as Certification Bodies, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food staff, Crop Insurance staff, Agricultural lenders and others — require training opportunities as well. A university-level program, whether a certificate, diploma or degree program, would benefit this group of stakeholders by providing accreditation for their studies. As suggested in the section on Educational Models, the development of a Saskatchewan certificate program might be a logical first step to take. There are some good examples and existing curricula from which to draw, including the Organic Agriculture Certificate, at the Assiniboine Community College in Brandon, and the Certificate in Organic Specialization, at the NASC in Nova Scotia.

Initial cooperation amongst Canadian Universities has already begun in some respects, with the Certificate in Organic Specialization at NASC. It is critical that they continue to work together on developing common curricula that embody the Canadian Standards and Regulations. Consideration should be given to formalizing a Canadian University consortium for development of a common organic curriculum that leads to a Bachelor of Science major in Organics. This process undoubtedly will take some time.

An excellent model to look to, for this process, comes from a consortium of European universities, formed in 1994, to develop curriculum for ecological agriculture. The Curriculum Development in Ecological Agriculture Consortium[43] was established with funding from the European Union's ERASMUS (now SOCRATES) program, which promotes student and staff mobility and other collaborative activities between European universities. There are currently 10 participating universities, with SOCRATES-funded student mobility links among them. Three of the universities (in the United Kingdom, Denmark, and Germany) are currently teaching the common semesters for the Ecological Agriculture specialization at a Bachelor's level. It is envisioned that additional universities will become involved in teaching the specialization, and that continuing curriculum development work will lead to a Master's level common program in Agroecology.

This cooperative approach to curriculum development would be very beneficial to the Canadian organic sector and should be pursued by its leaders.

This study suggests that there is enough merit to pursue these actions as they stand but also recommend further studies of University Students be conducted to determine their needs as they apply to accreditation of organic courses and programs.

---

[43] See European Universities' Consortium for a Common Curriculum in Ecological Agriculture. <http://www.irs.aber.ac.uk/research/Organics/training/consort.html>.

Mentorship Program & Field Studies

A fully supported mentorship program should be developed and offered to organic producers as they work through their transition to an organic production system from a conventional chemical farming one. This program might closely resemble the "Business Support for Transition to Organics" program that was featured earlier in this study. The program requires support materials and access to professionals for the mentors, as well as remuneration for their efforts. The apprentice should also be provided with the necessary tools. The mentorship process should guide the producer through the first three years of production in an Organic system, and be complemented with additional courses and training. This may come from a combination of sources such as conferences workshops and courses but would most definitely include hands on learning opportunities.

Ongoing research and field demonstrations also play an important role in the education process. The continued involvement of Organic producers who are committed to on-farm research should also be worked into the eventual course of training. These leading-edge Organic producers need to be supported in the important work that they do.

Conferences and Workshops

Opportunities exist to support the majority of producers who prefer to learn in the workshop or conference environment. Advancement could be made by providing funding for organic producers to attend major conferences, by approving them as learning events under the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS) program.

Funding to enhance existing conferences, such as Organic Connections, to increase the learning component for producers would be a benefit. A fair number of workshops are offered by various stakeholders but more could be done in this regard. Needs as presented by producers in this survey should be considered when developing the workshops.

FEASIBILITY STUDY

Prairie Ursuline Centre

The Ursuline Order was established in 1535, spreading rapidly throughout Europe and, by the 19th century, throughout the world. In 1919, the Ursuline Sisters of Bruno built a residence/boarding school in Bruno, Saskatchewan, which they operated as a school from 1922 until 1982. About 2,500 students graduated from the facility during this time.

Now called the Prairie Ursuline Centre,[44] the facility is located at the end of Main Street in the Town of Bruno. It is a 60,000-square-foot facility on 65 acres of land. It can accommodate up to 100 people overnight, with varying levels of accommodation. Semi-

[44] See Prairie Ursuline Centre. <http://www.pucbruno.com/>.

private rooms and private rooms are available. Several private rooms have an adjoining toilet, and others are available with a sink and vanity. The commercial kitchen can prepare meals for more than 500. The facility has a full-size gymnasium/auditorium that can seat groups of up to 400, and a large conference hall with room for 100. The facility also has five traditional classrooms, numerous office spaces, meeting rooms, artist studios, and a commercial art gallery. An elevator makes most of the building wheelchair accessible. A small equipped kitchenette is available for travelers who wish to prepare their own meals. High-speed wireless internet access is also offered.

The facility currently functions as a meeting and events centre. This takes advantage of its strengths, in terms of its ability to accommodate large groups of people in a relatively central location.

The Prairie Ursuline Sisters number 23 members, most of whom are elderly and who live in nearby Humboldt. Sister Maureen Maier is the Chief Executive Officer, who, together with her Director of Business Development, Randall Kehrig, and two other full-time staff members, are charged with operating the facility while they attempt to sell it.

The sisters are planting 40 acres of sour cherries on the property, in the hopes that this will become a revenue stream for the facility and will enhance its sale value.

Prairie Ursuline Centre as a Dedicated Organic Learning Centre

What is the potential, then, for Prairie Ursuline Centre as a Dedicated Organic Learning Centre? In the following section, we look at the advantages as well as the disadvantages.

Advantages:

- PUC is centrally located in a rural setting.
- It is a large facility, capable of handling large events.
- There are classrooms and other rooms that could be converted into research laboratories.
- It has a small arable land base that is suitable for research plots.
- The grounds are well developed and make for a park-like setting.
- The facility currently has revenue of about $240,000, including $20,000 in rental income, $115,000 in accommodation, and $100,000 in meals and refreshments. It is unknown what the contribution margin is for accommodations, meals and refreshments.
- The property was listed with Century 21 for $350,000, although discussions with PUC officials indicate that there may be room to negotiate.
- There are synergies, within the Bruno/Humboldt/Marysburg area, with the Organic Crop Improvement Association Western Canadian offices, Prairie Ursuline Centre and Earthcare Connections all centrally located.

Disadvantages:

- The Ursuline Sisters enjoy a property tax holiday that is unlikely to extend to new owners. According to Randall Kehrig, the expected property tax cost would be somewhere around $25,000 per year; however, this would have to be negotiated with the Town of Bruno.
- Depending on the vision for the facility, the renovation costs needed to make the facility optimal for the task at hand could be huge. The facility features older windows and doors, an antiquated boiler system, and some asbestos insulation.
- The operation of PUC requires administration, maintenance and hospitality staff. The Business Development Manager is a consultant who is employed full-time to help sell the facility. The notion is that a buyer can be attracted if the facility were profitable and so they are aggressively looking for new organizations to rent rooms, and they are also planting a substantial orchard of sour cherries, which they hope to have as a revenue source in the future.
- While the relatively isolated location may be all right for short-term conferences, it likely would not satisfy people for long periods, particularly young people.
- Information provided by the Ursuline Sisters indicated that the facility is currently losing more than $5,000 per month and, in the past two years; the losses have ranged from $90,000 to $190,000 annually. Total gross revenues range from $220,000 to $240,000.
- PUC is a large, old building that carries a considerable amount of overhead with it. The small arable land base that would be used for organic test plots has been conventionally farmed, and there are reports that genetically modified canola has been produced on the site.
- The University of Saskatchewan had leased the facility for $1 per year for the five years leading up to 2004, but terminated the agreement because they were running deficits in the range of $80,000 to $100,000 per year.[45] Bruce Hobin, the Bruno Campus Director for the university, stated, at the time, that the "business plan for the conference and meeting facility was flawed by underestimates of start-up costs and overestimates of what users would be willing to pay." In view of the fact that the Bruno Campus was part of a greater organization, it may be that some of the costs of operating PUC were buried in the overall university budget — in some of the staffing costs, for example. This would mean the losses were greater than reported.
- From the Ursuline Sisters' perspective, the facility is essentially a liability, in that it would cost somewhere between $350,000 and $500,000 to demolish it.

---

[45] See MacPherson, Colleen. (February 6, 2004). U of S ends trial operation of Bruno Ursuline campus. On Campus News. Vol. 11, No. 10. <www.usask.ca/communications/ocn/04-feb-06/news04.shtml>.

Renovations to the Facility

The building could be used as is; however, it would be wise to have it thoroughly inspected to determine whether any major repairs are required. Past renters have indicated that there were some things that would have to be changed in order to raise the facility to professional standards. It is impossible to accurately estimate the renovation cost, because there would be many alternatives to have to work through. Suffice it to say that the renovation cost would probably start at $100,000 and could run into the millions.

Purchase of Equipment

The equipment purchase cost is also difficult to estimate, because of the wide range of alternatives available. At minimum, the facility would require new desks and other furniture, $25,000-$50,000 for a high capacity photocopier, and other office and multimedia equipment. The research component would add to the cost of equipment and building renovations, and also for land development. Assuming that the existing business model was followed to the point that the Organic Learning Institute could generate revenue using the new model, this would require that about $200,000 in operating shortfalls be covered.

Start-up costs

Assuming that the purchase price could be not be negotiated, a rough estimate of the start-up costs of a facility such as PUC is as follows:

PUC Estimated start-up costs

Asking price to purchase facility	350,000
Legal and administrative costs associated with the purchase	10,000
Renovations	100,000
Student desks and other furniture	10,000
Office equipment	75,000
Orchard maintenance and development	15,000
Land development	20,000
Laboratory equipment	

	20,000
Working capital	200,000
Total	**800,000**

Estimated Costs of Operation

The revenue and expense associated with Prairie Ursuline Centre depend on how the facility is used. It is currently being used as a sort of convention facility, with frequent weekend events occurring. Most of these events involve one- or two-day sessions, with revenue generated from the use of daily meeting rooms, overnight accommodation room rentals, and use of the kitchen facilities. Local groups also rent meeting rooms or the gymnasium on a regular basis. It is unlikely that a *Dedicated Organic Learning Center* would utilize the entire facility by itself.

The following scenario assumes that the existing PUC business model is followed, the main difference being that the Executive Director would have duties relating to the development and delivery of Organic programs. No estimate of revenue is provided because there are too many variables.

Prairie Ursuline Centre Projected Expenses
Estimated Annual Expenses

Accounting	10,000
Advertising & promotion	25,000
Building repairs & maintenance costs	40,000
Utilities	55,000
Insurance	20,000
Kitchen supplies	46,000
Office expenses	10,000
Employee wages & benefits (at 18% of wages)	65,000
Executive Director	70,800
Property Taxes	25,000
Total expenses	**366,800**

PUC has been generating between $140,000 and $240,000 in gross revenues over the past two years (with the difference relating mainly to room and accommodation income). If one assumes that non-organic-related gross revenue streams would remain at the $240,000 level, then the *Dedicated Organic Learning Center* would have to come up with an additional $130,000 per year to break even. This assumes that existing revenues can be maintained and existing expenses can be contained. This also assumes that the Executive Director can pursue the interests of the organic community as well as handle the role that the Business Development Manager currently handles.

PUC Suitability

Components to consider when assessing any particular location include the following:

- The availability of land that could be used for research plots;
- The presence of classrooms and larger meeting room(s);
- Dining and room accommodations for a large number of people (or access to these nearby); and
- Easy accessibility for its users.

How does PUC stack up against these components?

The availability of land that could be used for research plots: PUC meets this qualifying factor; however, the land has been conventionally farmed and may have been used for genetically modified crops. 40 acres of the total 65-acre parcel (and not all of it is arable) is being planted with cherry trees. This severely limits the amount of land available for organic research plots of crops other than cherries.

Classrooms and larger meeting room(s): PUC exceeds this criterion; it is *too* large. Heating and maintaining a 90-year-old, 60,000-square-foot building seems like a great expense to utilize a few classrooms, meeting rooms, and land for research plots.

Dining and room accommodations for a large number of people: The facility has several different levels of accommodation. There are semi-private rooms (many dormitory style) and private rooms available. Several private rooms have an adjoining toilet and others are available with a sink and vanity. All sleeping quarters are located near washrooms and showers. With this array of rooms they can accommodate up to 100 people overnight and provide meals in the commercial kitchen for about 500. There are few other options in town to accommodate large numbers. There is a limitation on access to additional staff in the immediate area.

Accessibility for its users: Bruno is located on a paved highway access road, 85 kilometers east of the City of Saskatoon and 245 kilometers northwest of Regina. It could be described as a North Central location (in terms of farmed land) of the province and therefore a further distance for those organic producers located in the southern

parts of the province. 51%% of the survey respondents preferred to travel no more than 200 kms to gain access tc training, the distance to Bruno would put many of them outside this range.

PUC Risks of Ownership

While the PUC facility provides some interesting potential, there are also considerable risks involved:

- The risk of ownership is substantial. This risk includes unexpected costs in relation to the physical structure and grounds. With structures this old, the need for repairs can come up unexpectedly and may be substantial. For example, in 1996, the building foundation of the Saskatchewan Legislature was found to be failing. The Legislative Building Rehabilitation Project[46] was initiated to repair the building and the work was done over four years at a cost of $18.6 million dollars. The legislature is about four times the size of PUC, but it is the same age.
- The building is not energy-efficient and, with oil prices being what they are, it is likely that operational costs will continue to escalate. There is a need for energy-saving renovations.
- The building is considerably larger than what is required, and the layout does not optimally use the space that is there.
- There would be a continued need to generate rental income from the facility by renting it out to other organizations. This would fuel a need to continually attract such organizations. This confuses the business model for a Dedicated Organic Learning Centre, by forcing it to function as a convention centre.
- The past operational losses are a good indication of what the future might bring.

PUC as a Host for Organic events

PUC has been used numerous times as a host site for Organic events, and this has worked extremely well. The willingness of the staff to meet Organic needs, such as providing organic meals, is not always possible in other facilities. Organic producers who have used the facility were fairly pleased with the outcomes: 49% of them surveyed felt it met their expectations in terms of accommodations, meals, meeting rooms etc.

It is possible to continue to use PUC in the same manner as in the past, as long as the site remains open and available for rental and accommodation use. There may also be an opportunity to base an organic staff person at this location, by renting office space for an Executive Director or coordinator.

As mentioned earlier (in Section IV: Educational Models and Opportunities – Dedicated Organic Learning Centres, page 69) Organic stakeholders should develop a common

[46] See The Saskatchewan Legislative Building Rehabilitation Project. <http://www.legrehabgov.sk.ca/what's_new/whatsnew.html>.

vision using a strategic plan process, and better define what they want and need in a Learning Centre before proceeding in any one direction.

The Craik Alternative

Another option to look at, when considering an existing site or location for an Organic Learning Centre, is the synergies that have also developed along Highway 11 between Saskatoon and Regina, Saskatchewan's two major cities.

The Craik Sustainable Living Project Inc. (CSLP)[47] is a non-profit organization which aims to advance the local use of more ecologically sound technologies and ways of living. The Mission and Vision for the Craik Sustainable Living Project would likely be quite amenable to that of a *Dedicated Organic Learning Center*, and the location of such a facility in Craik would build on strengths that already exist.

The Craik Eco-centre is a multi-purpose facility featuring innovative and energy-efficient building design and integrated heating, cooling, and electrical systems that are the focal point for indoor and outdoor demonstration and educational programming on sustainability.

The CSLP features a commercial kitchen with a capacity for 50 people, as well as meeting and conference rooms that are rented out. CSLP also features a modern golf course for recreation. According to the Mayor of Craik, a local developer is in the process of selling lots on which environmentally friendly homes and businesses are to be built. Currently, overnight accommodations can be obtained in both Craik and Davidson, which is only 30 kilometers away.

The area is also home to the *Back to the Farm Organic Research Farm*, located between Girvin and Davidson. The organic research and demonstration farm, operated by the Back to the Farm Research Foundation at Davidson, Saskatchewan, is the first agricultural research farm or station in Canada to receive organic certification. The farm received its organic certification status in 2002 from the Canadian Organic Certification Co-Operative.

A *Dedicated Organic Learning Center* could potentially build a new facility near the CSLP site or in one of several buildings that are for sale in the Town of Craik, including:

- The former hospital which has recently been used as a residence and is reportedly owned by Canada Trust, who foreclosed on it recently. This is roughly a 6000-square-foot facility. The Canada Trust contact is Linda at 866-400-9676, (quote mortgage #4502924-0208).
- The former CI Implements building is approximately 5000 square feet. The previous owner had been asking $70,000. New owner contact information is Conexus Credit Union, at 800-667-7477.

---

[47] See Craik Sustainable Living Project. <http://www.craikecovillage.ca/>.

- The Anglican Church building is about 5000 square feet and is for sale for $12,000. Owner contact information is 306-775-0331 or 306-535-6451.

The owners of these properties were not contacted directly, but their contact information is given above. The cost of renovating one of these buildings would depend on the existing design and the level of renovations required/desired.

Renovate in Craik
Estimated start-up costs

Purchase facility for asking price	20,000
Legal and administrative costs associated with the purchase	5,000
Renovations	110,000
Student desks and other furniture	10,000
Office equipment	75,000
Laboratory equipment	20,000
Working capital	200,000
Total	**440,000**

The operating costs in Craik would be significantly lower than at PUC:

Renovate in Craik - Projected Annual Expenses

Estimated Annual Expenses	
Accounting	10,000
Advertising & promotion	25,000
Building repairs & maintenance costs	2,500
Utilities	12,000
Insurance	10,000
Office expenses	10,000
Executive Director	70,800
Property Taxes	3,000
Total expenses	**143,300**

Another option would be to construct a new facility similar to the CSLP (irrespective of location). Like the Eco-centre, the new building would be designed to use as few energy requirements as possible to run the building. Secondly, energy requirements will be fulfilled as much as possible by renewable energy resources, as opposed to non-renewable resources. The Eco-centre is a post-and-beam construction, and the beams in the building came from one of the elevators in Craik that was torn down. The beams were treated with a solution of linseed oil and turpentine. The ceiling wood is solar kiln-dried pine (1 X 6) that came from Love, Saskatchewan. They were treated with sand seal and varnish. The front doors were made from the cut-offs of the timbres. As much as possible, materials used were recycled or local, and those that needed to be purchased were carefully selected according to environmental and socially sustainable criteria. The insulation for the walls is durum wheat straw bales. The bales are a standard square bale and were baled by a local farmer. The straw provides an insulation value of R-40. The roof has blown cellulose as its insulation, which provides an R-50 value of insulation.

According to the Town of Craik, the building was designed by Cory Gordon of Saskatoon and was built by local sub-contractors, with some volunteer help. The cost was approximately $600,000, and this included the cost of the commercial kitchen and the furniture.

New Eco-friendly Facility in Craik
Estimated start-up costs

Build new facility	500,000
Legal and administrative costs associated with the purchase	5,000
Student desks and other furniture	10,000
Office equipment	75,000
Laboratory equipment	20,000
Working capital	200,000
Total	**810,000**

The operating costs of a new high-efficiency building would be lower, as indicated in the following table:

New Eco-friendly Facility
Projected/Estimated Annual Expenses

Accounting	10,000
Advertising & promotion	25,000
Building repairs & maintenance costs	2,500
Utilities	5,000
Insurance	10,000
Office expenses	10,000
Executive Director	70,800
Property Taxes	3,000
Total expenses	**136,300**

IN SUMMARY

The Saskatchewan Organic Training Needs Assessment has a very wide focus of study and incorporates a great deal of information. There are several recurring themes and relevant outcomes from the study. It is the belief of Sage Management, that further and more detailed study is needed in specific areas before firm decisions are made.

The strategic direction of the Organic Sector in Saskatchewan will be aided by the provincial government's recent commitment to further look into that sector's needs and requirements for support. It is the hope of all those who were involved with this study that concrete actions will be taken, educational support systems be developed, and that developing an Organic Learning Centre continues as a pursuit.

The attached recommendations (see Appendix A, p 89) encompass ideas expressed within the document in a way that summarizes and suggests specific action to address the most salient information gathered in the survey.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Recommendations

The following recommendations arise from the overall study.

General Recommendations for Advancement of the Organic Sector in Saskatchewan:

1. Representatives and stakeholders of the Saskatchewan Organic Sector, along with the Province of Saskatchewan, should work together to develop a Provincial Organic Strategy that can be supported by all in the industry. The Strategy should tie in with a National Strategic Plan and be reflective of any new Standards and Regulations.

2. The organic sector needs to develop an informational brochure that lays out statistical information including economic, environmental, and social contributions to the province, as well as potential health benefits of organics. The information needs to be as complete as possible and will require cooperation by certifying bodies, processors and sellers of organic products. The information could be designed to be used as a lobby tool when looking for financial and policy support.

3. The provincial government, along with organic sector stakeholders, should pursue a study mission to Europe and other locations such as Cuba, to review actions that have been taken there to support the growth and development of their Organic Sectors. Areas to research would include Learning Centres, Research Centres and other Educational Facilities, policies and economic impact of actions taken. The study mission should look for parallel opportunities that may exist for the province of Saskatchewan and meet with similar organic groups and representatives within those countries visited.

4. Establish a forum in which key representatives of the lending industry can gain a better understanding of organic production systems and marketing scenarios. The goal would be to secure greater ease of financing for producers, processors and marketers of organic products.

Recommendation to increase Consumer Education and Awareness:

5. Pursue an Organic Promotions Plan that focuses on educating the consumer about all the benefits of eating organic — health, environment and social.

6. Develop an Organic Resource Guide listing all available resources that exist in the sector. The guide should include organic products and services, and how to access them.

7. An opportunity exists to increase consumer support, boost sales, and access additional funding by substantiating health claims. Scientific research should be undertaken to provide factual information and the ability to support health claims. Positive results should be exploited to their fullest advantage and used to support a complete marketing program. This research should be seen as a priority for Saskatchewan's scientific research community and supported by the provincial health budget.

8. Organic products should have specific informational brochures, fact sheets or labels that explain the health benefits derived from consuming that product. Retailers should be lobbied to display fact sheets close to their products. Farmer market operators should offer informational material at their tables, with supporting facts and figures for their specific products.

9. In order to educate consumers, one should educate their children. Therefore, the organic industry should seek representation with "Agriculture in the Classroom" and develop materials for teachers to use in the classroom. The organic industry should also work with the education system to ensure there is a balanced approach to what young people are being taught about agriculture and food production, so they will understand the impact of the choices they make in the grocery store, in the future.

Recommendations for the advancement of Skill Development and Resources for Organic Producers:

10. It is recommended that Canadian Universities and Colleges form a consortium to develop curricula in Organic Agriculture/Ecological Agriculture that promotes student and staff mobility among universities, and creates common course material with a Bachelor's level specialization. With continued curriculum development work, this could lead to a Master's level program.

11. Conduct a study of the students at the College of Agriculture, U of S, to determine the interest level and potential for the offering of a Agriculture degree with a major in Organic Production.

12. The Organic Production Manual produced by SOD should be updated and have additional resources about Organic Livestock and Horticulture Production practices added to it. The updated manual should be formatted and made available on CD ROM, as well as in binder format.

13. Establish a Saskatchewan-based organic library that maintains reference material in hard form, as well as on-line, and which acts as a central distribution desk and has a lending policy similar to that of public and university library systems.

14. Make an application to Canadian Adaptation and Rural Development Saskatchewan (CARDS) for funding to develop courses to be delivered through a Certificate in Organic Agriculture Program.

15. Organic Connections should complete an application to the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service for approval as a recognized Learning Activity, and therefore qualify for support funding for eligible organic producers who attend the conference in November. (This action was accomplished over the course of the study.)

16. Develop a formalized mentorship program that includes support and resource material for the acting mentors, as well as remuneration for their training endeavors with new organic producers. The program should also be designed to be Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS)-eligible for participating trainees.

17. Develop an "Organic Leaders Program" at Canadian International Grain Institute (CIGI) that, among other things, acquaints producers with the resources that exist in Winnipeg and determines how they may be applied to the Organic Sector in the future.

18. Pursue eligibility of the Organic Certification process as an approved Learning Activity under the CASS program. Failing this application, the Government should give consideration to a support program for producers wishing to transition to organic production systems from conventional ones.

19. The Organic Sector should pursue an opportunity to work with the First Nations Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan (FNACS) on programs that will potentially benefit both parties. The FNACS' goal of producing natural products on their reserves and providing healthier food for their people to eat could be met by providing a formalized mentorship program for First Nation farmers, or by initiating community garden projects on rural and urban reserves. Utilize Organic Sector information, but incorporate required curriculum content with traditional knowledge appropriate to First Nations.

Recommendation on the Establishment of an Organic Learning Centre

20. Based on our assumptions as noted in this report, it is recommended that, due to the risk factor and extraordinary costs associated with the Prairie Ursuline Centre, the organic sector not pursue ownership of this facility. If the intent is to establish a dedicated Organic Learning Centre, it is our opinion that a strategic plan first be developed that includes a common vision for an Organic Learning Centre, and an in-depth Feasibility Study for the development of this centre be conducted prior to any investment.

Appendix B: References

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC and Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA). Cost benefit analysis of the effects of federal regulation for organic products: final report. <http://www.cog.ca/documents/cost_benefit_federal_regulation_part3.pdf>.

Assiniboine Community College. Brandon Manitoba. <http://public.assiniboine.net/Default.aspx>.

Atlantic Canadian Organic Network. <www.acronorganic.org>.

Bonti–Ankomah, Samuel. (March 2006). Organic and Conventional Food: A Literature Review of the Economics of Consumer Preferences and Perceptions. Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Bromm, Jennifer. Research Assistant, Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada.

Canada marks an organic milestone. <http://www.newfarm.org/features/2006/0106/guelph/henderson.shtml>.

Canadian Organic Growers. <www.cog.ca>.

Craik Sustainable Living Project. <http://www.craikecovillage.ca/>.

Dumont Technical Institute. 917 -22nd Street West, Saskatoon SK S7M OR9. (306) 242-6070.

Environics International Ltd. (2001). Food issues monitor survey 2001. Subscribe for reports at <http://www.environics.net/eil/>.

European Universities' Consortium for a Common Curriculum in Ecological Agriculture. <http://www.irs.aber.ac.uk/research/Organics/training/consort.html>.

Everage, L. (2003). Spring natural/organic handbook: state of the natural/organic industry. Gourmet Retailer Magazine. <http://www.gourmetretailer.com/gourmetretailer/search/search_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1839669>.

Everdale Organic Farm & Environmental Learning Centre. <www.everdale.org/>.

Falls Brook Centre. 125 South Knowlesville Road, Knowlesville NB E7L 1B1. <http://www.fallsbrookcentre.ca/agriculture/apprenticeships.htm>.

First Nations Agriculture Council of Saskatchewan Inc. Keith LePoudre, GM.

134-335 Packham Avenue, Saskatoon SK S7N 4S1. (306) 978-8872.

Frick, Brenda. Prairie Organic Specialist, Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada.

Grupo de Agricultura Organica (GAO). Tulipan 1011 e/Loma y 47 Apdo. Postal 6236C,Codigo Postal 10600, Nuevo Vedado Ciudad de La Habana, CUBA. Phone: +53 7 845 387; Fax: +537 845 387; Dr. Fernando Funes-Aguilar, President. Email: <actaf@minag.gov.cu>.

25th Guelph Organic Conference. <www.guelphorganicconf.ca/>.

Iowa Public Television Market to Market report. (Recorded February 21, 2003). Tuscarora Organic Growers Cooperative. Hustontown, Pennsylvania.

Kitsaki Management Limited Partnership. P.O. Box 480, La Ronge SK SOJ ILO. (306) 425-2600.

Kootenay Permaculture Institute. <http://www3.telus.net/permaculture/>.

Laird, Elmer. Back to the Farm Research Foundation. Box 69, Davidson, SK SOG 1AO.

Luneng, Marlene. Skills Training Coordinator, Carlton Trail Regional College. 623-7th Street, P.O. Box 720, Humboldt SK SOK 2AO.

Macey, Ann. (March 2004). Certified Organic Production in Canada 2004. Prepared for Agriculture and Agri-food Canada. Revised May 2004 & July 2004.

---. (Nov. 2005, Canadian Organic Growers). Certified Organic Production in Canada 2004.

MacPherson, Colleen. (February 6, 2004). U of S ends trial operation of Bruno Ursuline campus. On Campus News. Vol. 11, No. 10. <www.usask.ca/communications/ocn/04-feb-06/news04.shtml>.

Midwest Organic & Sustainable Education Service. P.O. Box 339, Spring Valley WI 54767. <http://www.mosesorganic.org>.

Nicolas, Kari. Program Coordinator, Agriculture Programs. Extension Division, University of Saskatchewan, Kirk Hall, 117 Science Place, Saskatoon SK S7N 5C8. (306) 966-5592.

Northern Light Foods. Wild rice producers.

Nova Scotia Agricultural College. Certificate of Specialization in Organic Agriculture. <http://nsac.ca/cde/courses/DE/Organic/default.asp>.

Organic Connections. <www.organicconnections.ca>.

Organic Growers School. 1623 Mount Hebron Road, Old Fort NC 28762. <http://www.organicgrowersschool.org/index.html>.

Organic Marketing Study. (April 2006). Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Saskatchewan. <http://organic.usask.ca>.

Prairie Ursuline Centre. <http://www.pucbruno.com/>.

Resource Guide to Organic & Sustainable Vegetable Production. ATTRA. <http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/PDF/vegetable-guide.pdf>.

Rosset, Peter. (May 29, 2006). Organic Farming in Cuba. <http://www.cosg.org.uk/rosset.htm>.

Saskatchewan Agriculture, Food and Rural Revitalization. (February 2005).

Saskatchewan Food Marketplace. Confederation Mall, 300 Confederation Drive, Saskatoon SK.

The Saskatchewan Legislative Building Rehabilitation Project. <http://www.legrehab.gov.sk.ca/what's_new/whatsnew.html>.

Saskatchewan Organic Marketing and Processing Directory. Reaching the World.

Sask Made. 8th Street East, Saskatoon, SK.

Slow Food. http://store.slowfood.com/store/welcome_eng.lasso.

Stewards of Irreplaceable Lands. P.O. Box 807, Sooke BC V0S 1N0. Phone/Fax: (250) 642-3671. E-mail: info@soilapprenticeships.org. <http://www.soilapprenticeships.org/>.

Tweed, Tony. Director of Programs, Canadian International Grains Institute.

University of Guelph Organic Agriculture Website. <http://www.organicag.uoguelph.ca/>

Willer, Helga. (2003). The European Project and Literature Database for Organic Farming Research. <http://www.darcof.dk/discuss/strat_uk.pdf>.

Willer, Helga & Yussefi, Minou. (Eds.). (February 2004). The World of Organic Agriculture: Statistics and Emerging Trends. www.soel.de/inahlte/publikationen/s/s_74.pdf.

Youngdahl, Donna. Organic Marketing Manager, Canadian Wheat Board. 423 Main Street, P.O. Box 816, Stn. Main, Winnipeg MB. (204) 983-3635..

Appendix C: Letter to Stakeholders (SAF Committee Chair)

To: All Certification Bodies
Western Canadian OCIA office, OACC Office, Simon Weseen
SAF-Blaine Reckseidler, Scott Wright, Director & Larry Gutek, Manager – CDB
Kari Harvey, Acting Director, Agri-Business Development Branch

Dear Organic Sector Stakeholder:

Re: Organic Training Needs Assessment Study

This letter is to advise you that the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (SOD) and the Organic Training Needs Working Group Committee has been successful in securing funding from Saskatchewan Learning under their Sector Partnerships Program to do a Training Needs Assessment for the Organic Sector in Saskatchewan. The steering committee for this initiative is made up of representatives from various groups including SOD, the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada, Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food, Sagehill Business Development Corporation, Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Science and Technology, the Prairie Ursuline Centre in Bruno and a couple of organic producers.

Following a tendering process in December 2005, the Steering Committee has recently retained Sage Management Services and Integrated Management Group of Saskatoon to do the study. The purpose of this letter is to advise industry stakeholders of the initiative and ask stakeholders for their full cooperation in this endeavour. We would also ask where possible that the Certification Bodies make their members aware of this initiative. Lorraine Beaudette with Sage Management Services will be the person doing most of the phone surveys and focus group work.

The objective of the study is to determine the training needs of the Organic Community and what education or training products could be assembled at the production, processing, marketing, certification and consumer awareness levels to help this industry move ahead in the province. The project will also identify appropriate delivery methods which are suited to and which will be the most productive for this sector.

When the study is completed in mid summer, it is our intention to make the results available to the general public via the internet.

Should you have any questions on this endeavour, please feel free to get in touch with me at 953-2361.

Respectfully Yours,

Don Perrault,
Committee Chair

cc: Betty Fisowich, Saskatchewan Learning

Appendix D: Letter to Stakeholders (Sage Management Services)

SAGE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

AGRICULTURE, EDUCATION, COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Name Date
Address1
Address 2

Dear: Madam or Sir:

Re: Training Needs Assessment
Saskatchewan Organic Sector

Sage Management Services (Sage) has been engaged to carry forward a ***Training Needs Assessment*** for the Organic Sector in Saskatchewan.

A few days ago, you should have received a letter from the Organic Training Needs Committee regarding the project and informing you of the importance of co-operation amongst all stakeholders in the sector.

It is imperative that we get a good understanding of the current learning needs of growers, processors and others within the organic industry prior to developing any training program. In order to ensure a complete representation of the Organic industry, growers are encouraged to participate to the fullest extent.

Sage will gather relevant information in the following manner:

- Tier One: Telephone surveys will take approximately 15 minutes in time and will establish a base line of information. Approximately 75 to 100 organic growers will be contacted.
- Tier Two: Telephone surveys will take approximately 30 minutes and will provide more detailed information on learning needs. Approximately 40 to 50 organic growers will be contacted.
- Focus groups will be held in four parts of the province and will involve 10 to 15 growers where possible.
- Personal one on one interview's will be conducted with interested participants.

Participants will be selected at random and the confidentiality of their identity will be maintained by Sage.

As a **Key Stakeholder**, it is our intention to involve you in the project. Sage looks forward to working with you on this exciting initiative, and to your contribution to its success.

If questions arise as a result of this notice, please contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Beaudette
Sage Management Services
cc: name

Appendix E: Invitation to Stakeholders (Sage Management Services)

SAGE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

AGRICULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL, COMMUNITY AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

[Name]
[Address 1]
[Address 2]

Dear [First Name], [June 30, 2006]

Sage Management Services (Sage) has been contracted to conduct a **Training Needs Assessment of the Organic Sector in Saskatchewan**. As a key stakeholder in this industry, determining **your needs** is of the utmost importance to ensure the success of any type of educational programs that may be developed.

A number of activities will be carried out over the next several weeks in order to gather information from growers, processors and other industry stakeholders.

These activities include:

- Tier One Interview - a 15 minute telephone interview
- Tier Two Survey - a 30 minute telephone interview
- Four Focus group to be held across the province
    - Melfort – Wednesday March 1, 9:30 to 11:30 am, Travelodge Hotel
    - Ft. Qu Appelle- Thursday March 2, 9:30 to 11:30 am, Country Squire Inn
    - North Battleford – Tuesday March 7, 9:30 to 11:30 am, Tropical Inn
    - Swift Current – Wednesday, March 8, 1:30 to 3:30 am , Days Inn
- Selected one-on-one interviews.

I would like to invite you to participate in the Swift Current focus group. If you have any questions or can commit to attend please call **Lorraine at Sage Management at 306-956-3136**.

We thank you in advance for your supporting role in the development of better educational tools for those committed to the organic sector in the province.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Beaudette
SAGE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Appendix F: Producer Survey

1. Which of the following best describes your current status?	❑ I am considering organic production ❑ My farm is in transition to organic production ❑ I am a certified organic farmer ❑ I am involved in organic processing ❑ Other _____
2. What commodities do you produce? *Please check all those that apply.*	❑ Grain and Oilseed production ❑ Livestock production. ❑ Fruit and/or vegetable production. ❑ Herb production ❑ Other, please specify_____
3. What percentage of your farm production: Is currently dedicated to organics? Do you plan to dedicate to organics?	❑ 0 to 25% ❑ 26%to 50% ❑ 50 to 75% ❑ 76 to 100% ❑ 0 to 25% ❑ 26%to 50% ❑ 50 to 75% ❑ 76 to 100%
4. How would you classify your current level of skills: As they pertain to Organic Production? As they pertain to Organic Product Marketing?	❑ Beginner ❑ Intermediate ❑ Experienced ❑ Expert ❑ Beginner ❑ Intermediate ❑ Experienced ❑ Expert Other, _____
5. What is your preferred method of communication?	❑ Mail ❑ Fax ❑ Email ❑ Telephone ❑ Text Messaging ❑ Other _____
6. Do you own a computer?	❑ Yes ❑ No
7. If yes to above question, which of the following apply to your current use of the computer?	❑ Non user ❑ Novice computer skills ❑ Manage okay on most programs ❑ Highly skilled ❑ Have high speed service or access to it ❑ Have dial up service or access to it ❑ Use for record keeping/data management ❑ Family use only ❑ Extensive use for farm operation ❑ Other _____
8. What level of education have you achieved?	❑ Completed grade school ❑ Completed high school ❑ Trade Apprentice or Journeyman

	❑ Certificate ❑ Diploma ❑ Degree Other _____
9. How do you currently gather knowledge required to adopt & apply organic practices? *Select all those that apply.*	❑ Field Demos ❑ From fellow organic growers ❑ Auditory tapes or CD ROM's ❑ Books & publications ❑ Saskatchewan Agriculture & Food Knowledge Center ❑ Saskatchewan Agriculture & Food Agrologist/Specialist ❑ Prairie Organic Specialist ❑ Workshops & Update mtgs. ❑ Organic Conferences ❑ Through available programs ❑ Through Internet- websites ❑ Other _____
10. What type of training setting do you prefer? *Select all those that apply*	❑ Class room ❑ Seminar or conference ❑ Daily class ❑ Workshops (1or 2 day) ❑ Week long ❑ Semester class ❑ Webinar (Web Seminar on line) ❑ Teleconferencing ❑ One on One ❑ Small group ❑ Large group
11. Where would you prefer to attend a training program? *Select these in order of preference with 1 being your first choice, 2 being your second choice and so on.*	❑ Local Community or Regional College ❑ On line at home or office ❑ In a major city ❑ Smaller Regional Setting ❑ In a Rural Environment ❑ Through Correspondence ❑ Other _____
12. What area/s do you require training in? *Please select all those that apply*	□ Production □ Organic Land Husbandry □ Organic Crop Production & Agronomics □ Organic Livestock Husbandry □ Marketing Raw and Processed Product □ Farm Gate Marketing □ Farmers Market □ Selling Skills

	☐ Wholesale Marketing ☐ Exporting Skills ❑ Farm Management Skills ☐ Strategic Business Planning ☐ Financial Planning ☐ Record Keeping ☐ Staff Management ☐ Customer Relations ☐ Meeting Certification & Regulatory Requirements ☐ Other _____
13. What type of official recognition would you want to achieve through training?	❑ Diploma ❑ Certificate ❑ Degree ❑ Non credit Other specify _____

14. Circle the appropriate response.	***Rate the level of importance*** **1** not important to me **2** Somewhat important **3** Greater importance **4** Is extremely important to me	***Do you currently have this Certification or Plan in place on your farm***
Organic Certification	1 2 3 4	☐ Yes ☐ No
Environmental Farm Plans	1 2 3 4	☐ Yes ☐ No
On Farm Food Safety	1 2 3 4	☐ Yes ☐ No
Certification	1 2 3 4	☐ Yes ☐ No
Foreign Certifications	1 2 3 4	☐ Yes ☐ No
CDN Standards & Regulations	1 2 3 4	☐ Yes ☐ No
Other		

15. Indicate the impact the following would have on your ability to further your education?		
	Rate the level of impact **1** Not an issue **3** More of a concern **2** Minimal problem **4** Serious impact	***What would you expect to/or be willing to pay for the following?***

Tuition [per course]	1 2 3 4	❑ $50 ❑ $100 ❑ $200 ❑ $500 +
Accommodations [per night]	1 2 3 4	❑ $35 ❑ $50 ❑ $75 ❑ $100 +
Loss of Farm Labour [a day]	1 2 3 4	❑ $50 ❑ $75 ❑ $100 ❑ $ 125 +
Loss of Farm Labour [week[	1 2 3 4	❑ $100 ❑ $200 ❑ $300 ❑ $ 500 +
Computer Resources [one]	1 2 3 4	❑ $800 ❑ $1000 ❑ $1500 ❑ $2000
Books [per course]	1 2 3 4	❑ $25 ❑ $50 ❑ $75 ❑ $125
Other		❑ _____ ❑ _____ ❑ _____ ❑ _____

16. How far would you travel for training?	❑ 50 -200 kms ❑ 200 – 500 kms ❑ Prairie Provinces ❑ Canada ❑ Internationally Other _____
17. If a portion or all of the training costs were covered would this change your answers?	❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Other_____
18. Have you completed a Learning Plan with a career counselor at a Regional College?	❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Other_____
19. Have you accessed funding for training under the Canadian Agricultural Skills Service (CASS)?	❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Other _____
20. Has your farm completed a Farm Business Assessment with a consultant through the Canadian Farm Business Advisory service?	❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Other_____
21. Do you market your products direct to Consumers?	❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Other _____
22. If yes to above question, which marketing methods do you use?	❑ Farm gate ❑ Farmers Market ❑ Retail outlet ❑ Other _____
23. Please indicate which methods you use or prefer to use to communicate with your customer and others?	❑ Via telephone ❑ Over the internet ❑ Use brochures, price and spec sheets ❑ Newsletter ❑ Advertising

	❑ Personal meetings ❑ Other _____
24. What percentage of your sales: Is sold in a local market? Is sold in Saskatchewan Market? Is sold in an Export Market?	❑ 0 to 25% ❑ 26%to 50% ❑ 50 to 75% ❑ 76 to 100% ❑ 0 to 25% ❑ 26%to 50% ❑ 50 to 75% ❑ 76 to 100% ❑ 0 to 25% ❑ 26%to 50% ❑ 50 to 75% ❑ 76 to 100% ❑ Other, please specify_____
25. What percentage of your sales are made: On your own? Through a Broker? Through Organic Elevator Other ?please specify _____	❑ 0 to 25% ❑ 26%to 50% ❑ 50 to 75% ❑ 76 to 100% ❑ 0 to 25% ❑ 26%to 50% ❑ 50 to 75% ❑ 76 to 100% ❑ 0 to 25% ❑ 26%to 50% ❑ 50 to 75% ❑ 76 to 100% ❑ 0 to 25% ❑ 26%to 50% ❑ 50 to 75% ❑ 76 to 100%
26. Are you familiar with the Prairie Ursuline Center, located at Bruno, SK?	❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Other _____

27. If yes to the above, please rate the following according to your experience?
1 does not apply 2 did not meet expectations 3 meets expectations 4 exceeds expectations

Accommodations	1	2	3	4
Meeting & conference rooms	1	2	3	4
Meals	1	2	3	4
Washroom facilities	1	2	3	4
Location	1	2	3	4
Management & Staff	1	2	3	4
Physical Environment	1	2	3	4
Cleanliness	1	2	3	4
Other	1	2	3	4

PLEASE FAX COMPLETED SURVEY TO: 306-956-3136

To ensure you are not contacted twice to complete the survey please complete the following:

Name: _____

Address: _____ PC _____

Phone Number: _____ Fax Number: _____

E-mail: _____ other number: _____

Appendix G: Press Release

TRAINING NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR THE SASKATCHEWAN ORGANIC INDUSTRY

April 3, 2006

The Saskatchewan Organic Directorate (SOD) has recently received funding from Saskatchewan Learning's Sector Partnerships Program to carry out an Organic Training Needs Assessment for the Saskatchewan Organic Sector, according to Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF) Agri-Business Development Specialist Don Perrault.

"The Organic Sector in Saskatchewan is growing rapidly and encompasses about 1200 producers in all areas of the province. Saskatchewan is also a leader when it comes to the Organic sector in Canada. Based on an Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) survey conducted in 2003, about one third of all Canadian organic producers are located in Saskatchewan—encompassing 58 percent of all lands in organic production in Canada.

Perrault believes organic production represents an excellent opportunity for growth in this province.

"This is due to our abundance of agricultural land and a reputation for a clean environment. The markets for organic foods continue to be strong and growing at 15 to 20 percent per year. It is also one of the sectors in agriculture that continues to be profitable."

For this reason, SAF has identified Organics as an opportunity area.

"We have a good toehold in this industry. We need to motivate producers to capture more the opportunities that manifest themselves within this market, and we need to capture the benefits that this represents."

Education and training are seen as critical elements in growing any new sector of the economy, Perrault explains.

"We hope that the Organic Training Needs Assessment will provide insights into the needs of the organic industry and appropriate learning models which will help propel this sector forward."

The study will also look at the concept of an Organic Learning Centre in the province to determine if this is a feasible avenue and whether it has some appeal to this community, Perrault goes on.

"A steering committee made up of representatives from the Organic Agriculture Centre of Canada, Sagehill Business Development Corporation, Carlton Trail Regional College, the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Arts and Science, the Saskatchewan Organic Directorate, the Prairie Ursuline Centre at Bruno and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food has been put in place to provide direction to the study."

In January, Lorraine Beaudette of Sage Management Services of Saskatoon was retained to carry out the Organic Training Needs Assessment.

"She has already established contact with many of the certification bodies in the province and a few producer groups. Over the next few weeks Sage Management Services will be surveying the various stakeholders of the Organic Community to obtain their views on future learning needs, preferred delivery methods, use of technology, and other areas of interest."

Perrault and his colleagues hope that the Organic Community will provide their best cooperation to this endeavour.

For more information contact:

Don Perrault,
Steering Committee Chair,
Agri-Business Development Specialist,
Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food
(306) 953-2361
dperrault@agr.gov.sk.ca

Lorraine Beaudette
Sage Management Services
RR 3, Gs 303, Box 9
Saskatoon, Sk, S7K 3J6
(306) 956-3136
sage@yourlink.ca